National Visiting Committee (NVC) Handbook

by

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Kalamazoo, MI 49008-5237

Fall 2003

A set of guidelines and operating principles
for the National Visiting Committees used in the Advanced
Technological Education program (ATE).
ATE is funded by the National Science Foundation.

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Many receive advice, few profit by it.
Publius Syrus, 42 B.C.

Introduction

Purpose and Goals

The Advanced Technological Education (ATE) program supported by the National Science Foundation funds projects to improve technological education at the undergraduate and secondary school levels. The goal of the program is to produce more technicians to meet workforce demands and improve the technical skills and content preparation of these technicians and the educators who prepare them. Most of its grants are made to two-year colleges.

Successful applicants for large grants (funded at $750,000 or more) are required to appoint a National Visiting Committee (NVC). These committees are groups of advisors that work with grantees and NSF to help them achieve their goals and objectives. They assess the plans and progress of the project and report to NSF and the project leadership. Committee members also provide advice to the project staff and may serve as advocates for effective projects.

In general, National Visiting Committees are similar to the advisory committees that are already an integral part of community colleges. In fact, most state and federally funded programs for these colleges require a local or regional advisory committee. However, there are differences between these committees and the NVCs. For example, local advisory committees report only to the project leadership who, in turn, set the meeting agendas. The NVCs not only report to the project, but also to the National Science Foundation.

Furthermore, NSF appoints the committee members, and the NVC chairperson plays a major role in setting the agenda.

The purpose of this Handbook is to help those who are responsible for organizing an NVC, planning and conducting meetings, and for postmeeting activities. It is intended for the chairs of NVCs, the project leadership (PIs or a project coordinator), and for committee members (advisors.)

This handbook is a set of reminders, called *checkpoints*, to consider when organizing and implementing NVCs. It is based on a literature search, observations of NVC meetings, and surveys of ATE project leadership. The handbook's format is a checklist of items together with explanatory text. The text includes examples of meeting agendas, suggested meeting topics, and details on how to have a successful meeting. References to actual ATE agendas, NVC reports, and project responses to these reports are provided. In addition, some suggestions for evaluating an NVC are included.

Committee chairs and project leaders are to consider the handbook a resource to help them with their NVC experiences. It is not intended to establish policy, nor does it necessarily apply to other NSF programs that use similar committees. Users are encouraged to consider each reminder and choose those that are applicable to their situations. We hope its use will help contradict the maxim quoted above penned by Publius Syrus more than 2,000 years ago. ATE projects should profit considerably from effective NVCs.

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Organizing a
National Visiting Committee

Overview

The primary responsibility for organizing an NVC lies with the principal investigator (PI). However, the PI works with his/her program officer at the National Science Foundation during this process. Some PIs also involve their co-PIs or their project coordinators.

It is useful to think of the NVC members as "critical friends." Their task is to help the projects and NSF implement successful projects. They help project staff consider and resolve concerns and issues and provide a "snapshot" of progress to NSF. It is important to establish collegial and professional relationships to make this process work.

Listed below are several key considerations to follow in organizing a committee. They are presented as checkpoints to help keep track of items to be considered.

Checkpoints

Committee Membership

✔   Select NVC members who are leaders in the fields of science, mathematics, engineering, technology, business/industry, and education.

NSF and PIs may recommend individuals for NVCs; however, the final responsibility rests with the Foundation. Usually, NSF suggests names of people who live outside the state in which the grant is located. However, qualified advisors who live in the state can be selected if approved by a program officer.

A directory of those who have served or are serving on NVCs has been developed by The Evaluation Center at Western Michigan University as part of its ongoing evaluation of the ATE program. The directory includes the affiliations, e-mail addresses, telephone numbers, and addresses of potential advisors. Approximately 110 names are included. The directory can be accessed at http://ate.wmich.edu.

When the selection process has been completed, the National Science Foundation usually sends out formal letters of invitation. PIs should contact their program officers to discuss this process. The project leaders may wish to send out letters of thanks to those NVC members who agree to participate.

✔ Consider advisors from business and industry, technology education, K-16 education, women, and minorities.

It is important to have a broad spectrum of backgrounds among the committee members. In this way, different viewpoints can be considered to help the project best achieve its goals. The backgrounds listed in the checkpoint above are made for committees that work with ATE projects. Different backgrounds may be needed for committees advising other NSF program areas.

Some examples might include teacher education, instructional systems, former students, curriculum development specialists, and the like.

✔ Choose advisors who have the time and are committed to serve.

Advisors are expected to attend all meetings, review materials, and help in writing the NVC reports. The annual time commitment is one to three days. The NVC chair has additional responsibilities that will require more time. Make sure advisors know the expected frequency of meetings and the likely date for the first meeting.

It is important to discuss consultant fees and expense reimbursement with possible advisors. Most ATE projects reimburse travel expenses but expect NVC members to serve as volunteers. If committee members are paid an honorarium, be aware that NSF has a limit on the amount of daily fees that can be paid.

Sometimes advisors may be called upon to spend additional time with a project to provide special expertise in a given area. However, such added requests are optional and not required of committee members.

In recognition of the time commitment given by these individuals, NSF will write letters of support to a member's employer or university administrator (president, dean, and department head) acknowledging the contribution of these professionals.

✔ Choose a chairperson who can effectively plan and run meetings and be responsible for preparing NVC reports.

PIs will work with their program officer to select an effective chair. The chair's task is to set the agendas, facilitate the committee meetings, and ensure that a committee report is prepared promptly. *In general, NVC chairs should not be members of the project leadership team*. Our observation of several NVCs suggests that separation of these roles results in a more effective NVC.

An analysis of 24 ATE projects and centers as part of another study revealed that NVC chairs had the following affiliations. (One project had co-chairs which gives a total of 25 in the list below.)

- A PI or co-PI from another ATE project   7[1]

- Industry representative   6

- Education (generally a community college administrator)   5

- Organization (usually a professional association**)**   4

- The PI of the ATE project   2

- Chairmanship rotates each year   1

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[1] Interestingly, one co-PI was chairing three different NVCs.

☑ Appoint advisors for a specific length of time.

Most ATE grants are expected to last a minimum of three years. Funding is annual with the expectation that subsequent years will be funded if satisfactory progress is made. Most advisors are asked to commit to three-year terms.

However, some projects have found that it works better to appoint members for either one- or two-year terms with the possibility of reappointment. This allows the project some flexibility to handle problem situations that might occur.   Effective advisors can be reappointed, and those who don't have the time or lose interest can be replaced.

☑ Be alert for potential conflicts of interest among the advisors.

Generally, this is not a problem. However, situations might occur where there are too many advisors from one company or institution. This could create conditions where the interests of the project might become secondary to the interests of the sponsoring company. Although it may be difficult to predict, try to avoid choosing those who have their own agendas and try to use the NVC or the ATE project to advance these agendas.

Size

☑ Determine the size of the committee.

Key trade-offs on committee size are cost and the number of people that can effectively interact during a meeting. NSF suggests that the size of an NVC, including the chair, be 4-6 members for projects and 8-10 for centers. In addition, most NVCs have an NSF program officer serve as an ex officio member of the committee. When the program officer cannot attend, they will often send a representative, typically a former NSF officer.

Data were available on the size of the 24 NVCs mentioned earlier. The average number of advisors on these committees was 7. The range was 4 to 13.

PIs are expected to include the cost of an annual NVC meeting in the proposal budget. Selecting large committees with the expectation that some advisors cannot attend a meeting is not recommended. NSF expects that NVC members who agree to serve will attend each annual meeting. This is the case, even though most committee members receive only travel expenses, not a consultant fee. The opportunity to help improve the nation's technological capacity seems sufficient reward to most potential committee members.

Support

☑ Provide adequate staff and financial support for the committee.

 Some things to consider are secretarial support, travel cost reimbursement, background publications, and consultant fees, if applicable.

☑ Make sure all those involved understand the purposes of a National Visiting Committee.

 The NVCs serve two major roles in the ATE program. They are to advise the projects and assess progress. The advising role is intended to help the project make improvements and enhance its likelihood of success. The assessing role helps gather evidence that the project is on track and is carrying out the activities that it promised. Or, if activity changes have been made, these changes should be documented and approved by the appropriate NSF program officer. In this way, the NVCs expand the capability of NSF to monitor its larger grants.

 NVC advisors can also assist a project by bringing its strengths and accomplishments to the attention of the faculty and administrators of the host institution. They may also disseminate information about the ATE project at their home institutions, at meetings of professional associations, and to the business/industrial community.

☑ Formally recognize and publicize the committee and its contributions.

Thank you letters are an effective way of showing appreciation for the work of NVC advisors. This is especially important since the time of most NVC members is donated, either by them or by their employer. Formally recognizing their contributions increases the likelihood of continued and productive service.

Some projects put the names and photographs of the advisory committees on the project's Web site. Others list them on project letterheads.

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Planning an NVC Meeting

Overview

Effective meetings require thorough and timely planning. In this section we present a set of checkpoints to consider when planning a committee meeting. Important steps in this process include determining the meeting purposes, setting an agenda, and deciding the particulars of the meeting. These steps are considered in order. Attention to these details should help you have a useful and rewarding meeting. Because the agenda is a key task in this process, it is considered in some detail.

Planning Checkpoints

Meeting Objectives

Review and clarify the objectives for each NVC meeting. These will help determine the agenda.

The NVC chair and the PI should meet several months before the visit to discuss the meeting objectives and start planning the agenda. In general, the committee is to assess the plans and progress of the project and prepare a report for the Foundation and the project staff. Recall that the general purposes are to provide information to the project, to NSF, and to the technological education community in general. However, each meeting will have its own specific objectives.
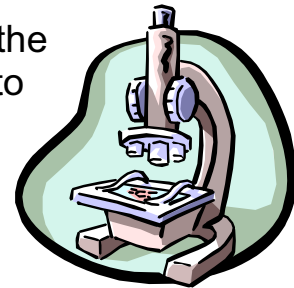
These objectives will arise from issues encountered by the project, decisions faced, and the impact of recommendations from previous meetings. In addition, the committee may have questions that it wishes to pursue. The focus of the meetings might vary depending on the age of the project. For example, the first meeting might address project plans and objectives; later meetings will likely focus more directly on accomplishments and long-term planning.

Time Considerations

✔️ Select a time for the meeting that fits well with the project's activities and is convenient for NVC members.

✔️ Try to avoid evening meetings or excessively long day meetings.

Advisors and staff need time for rest and reflection. Tired or bored advisors are not as effective as those who are alert and involved. Limit the meeting time to eight hours per day. Provide breaks and give participants opportunities to spend a few minutes outside the meeting room.

✔️ Have committee members schedule travel arrangements so they won't have to leave the meeting early.

Advisors should be expected to stay until the meetings end to help draft the committee report and participate in the debriefing process. It is best to schedule return flights no earlier than 90 minutes after the scheduled end of the meeting.

Agendas

☑ Limit the material to be covered during a meeting.

Project staff typically present too much information and don't provide enough time for discussion between topics.

☑ Develop an explicit meeting agenda that includes a time schedule.

Effective meetings require careful planning. The agenda and associated materials and presentations are the way in which the project informs the committee of its progress and the areas where it needs advice. It is important to establish an agenda that is doable within the "normal" day or day and a half meeting. In the interest in covering everything, it is easy for agendas to become overly ambitious.

One way to plan a meeting is to pose a series of evaluation questions that can be used in planning for their monitoring or assessing role.

Suggested Questions

Question 1. Has the project implemented the activities described in the proposal? (Nearly all projects list their goals and the activities that will be undertaken to achieve these goals. This question focuses on the things the project has done.)

Question 2. Is there evidence that those involved in the project have found the activities worthwhile? (Involved parties might be staff, participants, or external observers. Have these people found the activities useful?)

Question 3. Is there evidence that indicates that the goals of the project have been achieved? (Some examples are that student achievement has increased or that teachers are more knowledgeable about technology curriculum.)

Answers to these and other assessment questions will help the NVC and the Foundation determine if the project is on track and is likely to be successful. If problems are encountered, the experts on the committee can help NSF and the project decide what changes should be made. They can also assist in the implementation of these modifications.

To fulfill its advising role, NVCs must be responsive to the needs of the project. It will be necessary for the NVC chair to probe the

project leadership to determine what issues or problems they face. The NVC members can then be asked to provide advice on the resolution of these problems. For example, a common ATE question is, "How can we establish effective collaborations with our business and industry partners?" Members of the NVC can give guidance on how to address these and other questions designed to improve the project. Other questions for the ATE program might address issues of curriculum development, recruitment and retention, organization and management, professional development, sustainability, etc. The essential point here is that the NVC is available to help the project.

The key sources of information for planning a meeting will come from discussions the NVC chair has with the project director and with NSF program officers. Other data sources to help plan a meeting and establish an agenda might include (1) the original proposal, (2) goals and objectives, (3) time lines, (4) staff, (5) plan for institutionalization, (6) project status report, (7) local evaluation reports, (8) newsletters, and (9) project Web sites.

Many activities could occur during an NVC meeting. Most of these will be dictated by the purposes of NVCs and the specific objectives of the meeting. These will be determined by the Chair, the PI, and possibly by NSF program officers.

Suggested Activities

1. Initial group gathering (Welcome and brief overview)

    The initial meeting is done in a variety of ways. One popular method is to have an opening dinner reception the evening before the meeting. However, this approach has problems because the committee members arrive at varying times. Many take flights to the host city after work and don't arrive until late in the evening. Also, such dinners can be expensive.

    Some committees start their meeting with an early continental breakfast, expecting the advisors to arrive the previous day or evening. Another format has its members travel to the site the morning of the first day. The meeting starts around 1:00 p.m. on that day and continues until around 5:00 p.m. Members are free to have dinner on their own. The second day starts with a breakfast at 8:00 a.m. and continues until early afternoon, 1 or 2 p.m. Most members can leave at 2:00 p.m. and arrive home the same day. A few with longer travel times are required to stay over a second night and return home the next morning. In general, this format has proven to be quite successful.

2. Introductions of committee members, welcome, and remarks

3. Project progress reports

4. Reports of project evaluations (brief and focused)

5. Discussion of the evaluation questions and project issues to be resolved

6. Tour of facilities (usually only the first meeting. Limit this to an hour or two.)

7. Conversation with students

8. Preparation of a committee report

9. Debriefing to project leadership

The following example agenda is based on a review of several previous NVC meeting agendas. An agenda for an actual NVC meeting can be seen at http://ate.wmich.edu/.

1. Introductions and icebreaker activity (30 minutes) (See section on conducting a meeting for ideas)

2. Overview of the meeting (30 minutes)

3. Brief presentation of a project status report (30 minutes)

4. Discussion of project activities. Questions, affirmations, and suggestions by the advisory committee (1 hour)

5. Issues, concerns, and problems that the project or NVC wishes to address. Place in order of priority (3-4 hours)

6. Committee deliberations in executive session to develop a draft report (1 hour)

7. Initial draft report presented orally to project staff (30 minutes)

Agendas need to be followed if they are to serve their purpose. However, some flexibility is needed with the specific time allocations. These agenda components are offered as suggestions rather than prescriptions. Breaks should occur at least every two hours—breaks of 15 minutes or less are recommended. Lunch breaks of between 30 and 60 minutes are recommended.

☑ Send out the agenda and background materials one to two weeks before the meeting.

Before the NVC meeting, the PI and project staff should produce a narrative summary of progress toward goals and identify issues that they would like the NVC to address. This "project status report" might include items such as project goals or targets, strategies to achieve them, evidence of progress, and mediating factors.

Suggested Material for Project Status Report

- o *Students*: Description, numbers, progress, length of program, courses needed, placements, dropouts, and percentage completed or satisfactory progress

- o *Products:* Description, numbers, progress, completed and/or disseminated

- o *Staff:* Professional growth, numbers, assignments

- o *Plant/*facilities: Description and adequacy

- *Issues and concerns*: Specific topics where the project needs advice and assistance from its committee

Other background materials that might be sent to advisors include the original proposal, evaluation reports, and project responses to previous NVC reports. It is better to send hard copy rather than e-mail copies. Advisors won't have to spend time printing materials. Also, last minute e-mailed information may be viewed as a sign of a disorganized project.

Location/Facilities

☑ Choose a meeting site that helps portray the project in action and is convenient for the NVC members.

Most ATE meetings are held at a community college or at a nearby collaborating institution. For example, a project on petroleum processing was held in the conference room of a participating refining company. A project making curriculum changes in the state's two-year colleges held its meetings at the office of the State Board of Education. In addition, side trips were made to two of the state's two-year institutions.

Hotels often work well for NVC meetings. They have available parking, meeting rooms and sleeping accommodations are in the same building, and they can be reached easily from airports.

☑ The meeting room should be comfortable and able to accommodate the meeting needs.

Although this might seem obvious, it is too often ignored or forgotten. Remember to consider such things as size, room layout, noise, temperature, beverage and food service, audiovisual needs, etc.

☑ Arrange for meeting rooms and hotels, if necessary, well before the meeting.

Effective planners do this two or three months in advance. Send information regarding hotels, travel arrangements, meeting rooms, etc., to advisors. Ask for an RSVP and send out a reminder as the meeting gets closer.

-3-
Conducting an NVC Meeting

Overview

The specific topics to be covered during a NVC meeting will be listed in the agenda. Effective meetings will cover these items in a timely fashion and provide adequate opportunities for the advisor's comments and suggestions to be heard. The keys for a successful meeting are to have an effective chair or facilitator, advisors who understand how to participate in committee meetings[2], and project leadership that actively seeks advice and assistance.

The checkpoints listed below address these and other guidelines to help ensure you have an effective and useful NVC meeting.

Checkpoints

General Operating Principles

✓ Identify the person who will run the meeting.

The tendency for many projects is to have the PI or project coordinator manage a NVC meeting. However, it is usually more productive to have a trained facilitator or the NVC chair assume this responsibility. Designated chairs or facilitators seldom have established positions on the topics to

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[2] See *Meeting Reminders for Advisory Committee Members* by Robert A. Reineke. Published by the ATE Evaluation Project, Arlen Gullickson, Project Director. Available at http://ate.wmich.edu.

be addressed and are usually more open to a full and candid discussion of the issues, especially controversial ones.

☑ Determine and clarify the process the group will use to make decisions.

Most NVCs reach their decisions by consensus. That is, the members discuss and negotiate an issue and formulate a decision that everyone can "live with." Sometimes reaching a consensus can be time-consuming, but it should be manageable with a skillful chair. The advantages of group agreement, broad participation, and a buy-in to the decision generally outweigh the disadvantages.

Some committees function by majority rule, that is, one person, one vote, with the majority vote carrying the decision. This process may be implemented by the chair if a consensus is not reached. However, few NVCs seem to function this way.

Committees, especially the chair, should be alert for advisors who might dominate the decision process. This authoritarian approach where one member decides and the others acquiesce is not recommended for NVC meetings. Deliberate actions such as the use of breakout discussion groups and eliciting comments from all or most members can help reduce such effects.

☑ Keep minutes of the meeting.

A meeting held without keeping minutes is probably not worth having. Relying on the memory of participants is not effective. Often, two sets of minutes are prepared during a meeting, one by the project staff and one by the NVC. The committee will use its minutes for its executive session and to prepare its report. Project staff may want their own record of the various comments and suggestions made by the advisors for their own deliberations.

☑ Make sure all advisors have opportunities to participate in the discussions.

This is the responsibility of the chair, the project leaders, and the committee members. The chair should encourage all members to speak up and discourage those advisors who might dominate a meeting. Similarly, the project leaders should avoid the tendency for project staff to dominate the meeting. (One project we observed has a 50/50 rule. For each 10 minutes of staff presentations, 10 minutes are scheduled for advisory responses.)

Some suggestions for effective advisor behavior are found in *Meeting Reminders for Advisory Committee Members*. (See footnote on page 21.)

Chair Roles and Responsibilities

✓ Welcome the committee members and make introductions.

It is a good idea to provide name tags or table place names for those in attendance. Usually, people will also be asked to introduce themselves by giving their name and institutional affiliation and providing a sentence or two about their background and experience. Sometimes the chair will make the introductions if the group is fairly small and the chair knows their backgrounds.

Some projects start the meeting with an icebreaker activity. One ATE project we observed used a short quiz on the project to start the meeting. The participants were given a few written questions about the project. For example,

- Who are the partner institutions on the grant?

- How many teachers does the project expect to attend the summer institutes on processing technology?

Each participant was given one question to answer or to guess at an answer. Then the group discussed their answers or guesses. This was a way for the project to help the advisors learn more about the project and its activities.

Quiz Option

One ATE Center has developed a learning game called Questor. It is patterned after the popular television program, Jeopardy. A grid (usually 5 by 5, but any size may be used) includes categories of questions and an assignment of points for each category. The easiest question earns the player 100 points for a correct answer. The most difficult question could earn 500 points.

The Questor format could be used as an icebreaker activity for an advisory committee meeting. For example, suppose that the ATE project evaluation group at Western Michigan University was having a meeting of its advisory committee. Participants could be presented with the following Questor-like array of questions. They are asked to choose a cell and then are given a question to answer for that cell.

ATE Background Questions	Program Evaluation Questions	Evaluation Activities Questions
100 Points	100 Points	100 Points
200	200	200
300	300	300

Suggested Questor
Questions and Scoring

ATE Background
- 100 points: What is the general purpose of the ATE program?
- 200 points: What agency authorized the ATE program?
- 300 points: What is the approximate yearly funding level of the program?

Program Evaluation
- 100 points: What is the purpose of program evaluation?
- 200 points: What is formative evaluation?
- 300 points. Briefly describe the Program Evaluation Standards.

Or, under the **Evaluation Activities** category, the following question worth 200 points might be asked: What is the purpose of the annual survey conducted by WMU?

Individual committee members would be asked to choose a category and a level of difficulty and be given a question. The person would provide an answer, perhaps a guess, and then the group discusses the response in light of the correct answer. This procedure could also be used at the end of the meeting as a way to review what was discussed and what issues remain to be addressed before the next meeting.
More information on Questor, including the computerized version, is available from
http://www.matec.org/games.

☑ Be punctual with starting and ending times and with meeting breaks.

Effective meetings begin on time, have firm limits for coffee and lunch breaks, and end as scheduled. For example, a 15-minute break should last only 15 minutes. Such behavior encourages the advisors to be prompt and increases the amount of actual working time.

☑ Cover the items on the agenda.

While some flexibility may be necessary, it is the meeting facilitator's role to make sure the agenda items are discussed. The agenda was designed to make sure the committee addresses both its advising and assessment roles. Failure to cover the agenda items might jeopardize the committee's work.

However, the chair must also be receptive to new issues or problems that might arise during the meeting. The agenda should have some built-in flexibility so that new items can be considered.

☑ Prepare a committee report.

NVCs are expected to prepare a report of their meetings. This report goes to the project staff and to the National Science Foundation.

Suggested Committee Report Outline

A. Introduction and overview

The report might begin with a brief overview that includes topics such as the purpose and audiences of the report, the names of the advisors present, dates and duration of the meeting, and a timetable of the topics covered. It might be appropriate here to direct the reader to attachments such as a copy of the "Project Status Report," the meeting agenda, and other documents reviewed by the NVC.

B. Responses to previous committee recommendations

C. Issues and topics

This is a brief discussion of major topics or issues covered by the committee along with recommendations. One report we examined broke out each separate issue with the subjects discussed listed underneath.

Sample Issue Outline

Issue 1

- Project objective
- Strategies used to achieve the objective
- Evidence of success
- Mediating factors
- Recommendations or suggestions for project staff
- Lessons learned (if appropriate)

D. List of project strengths

E. List of project limitations

Other procedures for developing an NVC report have been used. One center uses an evaluation checklist to remind advisors to examine a variety of desired characteristics of a successful ATE project. Their judgments become the content of the NVC report. A modified sample of that checklist follows.

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NVC Meeting Evaluation Matrix[3]

The evaluation matrix is a checklist with attached rating scales. It serves as a reminder of the various aspects of a project or center that should be judged. Evaluators can check the response that applies, and space is provided for comments or explanations. N/O can be checked if the topic was not observed.

1. <u>Project mission, vision, and goals</u>

_____ Continue (no revisions) _____ Continue (minor revisions)
_____ Revisit (major revisions) _____ N/O

Evidence/Comments:

2. <u>Staffing and project management plan including financial planning and reporting system</u>

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[3] This document was adapted from the KIT Center Evaluation Matrix used by the Kentucky Information Technology Center. It was developed by Neil Evans, PI for the Northwest Center for Emerging Technologies (http://www.nwcet.org).

_____ Continue (no revisions)_____ Continue (minor revisions)
_____ Revisit (major revisions)_____ N/O

Evidence/Comments:

3. <u>Administrative support and business/industry and other partnerships</u>

_____ Strong _____ Adequate _____ Needs attention
_____ N/O

Evidence/Comments:

4. <u>Main project activities or subprojects including curriculum and/or course materials</u>

_____ Ahead of schedule _____ On schedule
_____ Behind schedule _____ N/O

Evidence/Comments:

5. <u>Documented worker or education demand and current supply (participant recruitment)</u>

_____ Strong _____ Adequate _____ Needs attention
_____ N/O

Evidence/Comments:

6. <u>Faculty recruitment, development, retention and professional development training</u>

_____ Exemplary _____ Adequate _____ Needs attention
_____ N/O

Evidence/Comments:

7. Publicity (Web site, newsletter, media coverage)

_____ Exemplary _____ Adequate _____ Needs attention
_____ N/O

Evidence/Comments:

8. Dissemination

_____ Exemplary _____ Adequate _____ Needs attention
_____ N/O

Evidence/Comments:

9. Response to previous NVC recommendations

_____ All or nearly all _____ More than half
_____ Less than half _____ N/O

Evidence/Comments:

10. Overall evaluation of project and local project evaluation

_____ Excellent progress _____ Satisfactory progress
_____ Limited progress

Evidence/Comments:

✓ Present the committee report orally to the project leadership.

Following the executive session, NVCs generally provide an oral summary of their observations and recommendations. The chair or her designee usually presents this report.

Project Responsibilities

✓ Distribute expense reimbursement forms and provide details to advisors on how and when to complete them.

Each institution has its own forms and procedures for handling expenses. Often misunderstandings and failure to complete forms accurately or completely (e.g., not providing a social security number) can cause delays in payment. Because prompt payment of expenses to NVC members is so important, we encourage taking some meeting time to discuss the proper completion of reimbursement forms.

✓ Continuously monitor the meeting room environment and make changes as necessary.

The meeting room should be comfortable and able to accommodate the meeting needs. Remember to consider those things that were part of the planning process. For example, room size and layout, noise level, etc.

Careful monitoring can avoid a situation we observed at one NVC meeting. During an evening session, cake and coffee were available on a side table. Several advisors went to this table and bought back coffee and a piece of cake. However, no one ate the cake. We later learned that the hotel had forgotten to provide forks and people were reluctant to eat it with their hands since it was covered with a white frosting. A person assigned the responsibility of monitoring the

meeting room environment probably would have noticed the mistake and gone to the kitchen to get forks.

It is a good idea to brighten up what is often a dreary meeting room. We suspect that dull and drab rooms result in dull and drab meetings. One meeting we observed put two small arrangements of fresh flowers on the meeting table. They added much to an otherwise nondescript conference room.

Most NVC meetings make available coffee or soft drinks and some kind of refreshments, e.g., cookies, fruit, or juice during the meeting. Committee members appreciate special efforts like this that make the meeting more comfortable.

✔   Encourage project staff to welcome suggestions and not be defensive.

NVC advisors are there to help the project. It is useful to think of them as critical friends. NVCs have helped projects in a variety of ways. For example, they have dealt with needed changes in leadership, addressed internal communication issues, worked with projects to develop business plans, and helped obtain additional support. In addition, they have provided advice to projects on a variety of issues and kept NSF informed of project progress.

☑ If a meal is to be served, try not to do it in the meeting room.

Spending all day in a campus or hotel meeting room can be a tedious experience. A change in surroundings is a nice break and lunch is a good time to do this. Avoid the commonplace practice of having food brought in and continuing the meeting while people are trying to eat. Getting up and moving to a different location is refreshing, as is a break from the meeting business.

☑ Provide time and a place for the committee to meet in an executive session.

This session is usually scheduled near the end of the meeting. Its main purpose is for the committee to discuss its findings and to draft a committee report. Some NVCs also meet in an executive session at the beginning to discuss what they would like to do during the meeting.

☑ Describe what work is expected, if any, from advisors between meetings.

Usually, the chair will ask the advisors to respond to a draft of the committee report. Sometimes one advisor will be asked to prepare a draft report and then submit it to the chair for final editing. A copy of the final report is submitted to NSF and the project leaders, usually by the committee chair.

Often there are unresolved issues that the project staff may wish to pursue after the meeting. They may ask individual advisors to work with them on

specific problems. In addition, committee members are expected to distribute information about the project as appropriate. Sometimes, this is done on the project's home campus. More often, the ATE project is publicized at the advisor's campus or during professional meetings.

The project leadership and the chair should identify the kinds of information that would be appropriate for advisors to disseminate in their advocacy role. Certainly, information contained in reports to the Foundation, progress reports, information on Web sites, and the like is public domain. However, issues of propriety need to be considered, especially on personnel matters, legal issues, internal conflicts, etc.

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After the Committee Meeting

Overview

Several things need to be done when the NVC meeting is finished. Chief among these is the preparation and distribution of the committee report. In addition, it is important to thank the committee for its work and to keep members informed of project progress. The ATE program also recommends that the committee process be evaluated to determine if it is achieving its objectives.

Below is a set of proposed checkpoints for the chair, the project leaders, and the meeting evaluation.

Checkpoints

Chair Responsibilities

✓ Finalize and distribute the committee report.

The chair is responsible for writing a draft report and sending it to the advisors for review. The revised report is then sent to the project staff for their review. Their primary task is to make sure that the factual portions of the report are accurate. Occasionally they may disagree with one or more of the committee's observations and recommendations. If the project staff have serious differences of opinion, it is
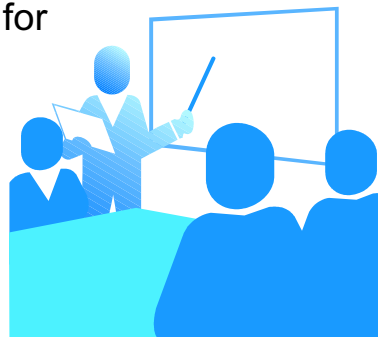
usually a good idea to include them in the NVC final report. This helps assure an open discussion of the issues. Following the receipt of comments from the project staff, the chair makes revisions and sends the document to the PI and NSF. Report submission should occur within four weeks after the NVC meeting.

Two examples of NVC reports for an actual ATE center and project are available on the Web at http://ate.wmich.edu/.

Project Leadership Tasks

✓ Send thank-you letters to meeting participants.

It is important to acknowledge the contribution of the NVC. Personalized thank you letters are an effective way to do this. These letters should be sent shortly after the NVC meeting.

✓ Make sure that payments (fees and/or expense reimbursements) are timely.

It is important to pay the honoraria and expenses soon after the meeting. Try to have checks sent within four weeks of the end of the NVC meeting.

Contact NVC members if they do not submit their reimbursement forms promptly. When the forms are received, immediately check the submitted information. Let them know if corrected or additional information or receipts are needed. Keep advisors informed of their reimbursement progress.

☑ Provide feedback on the report to the committee.

The project should prepare a written response to the NVC report explaining what was done because of the report. It should explain how each recommendation was addressed by describing what actions were taken. If no action was taken for a specific recommendation, the report should explain the reasons. The project response is usually discussed at the next committee meeting.

Readers can find an example of a written response to an NVC report on the Web at http//ate.wmich.edu.

☑ Keep advisors, especially the chair, informed of project activities between meetings.

Effective committees are knowledgeable about the project and its activities. Because, they meet periodically, usually once a year, it is important to keep advisors informed of project activities. Some things to include are staff changes, recent publications, new ventures, and project presentations. This can be done by sending out newsletters, e-mails, or by directing the committee to the project's Web site.

☑ Consider using advisors to help the project between committee meetings.

Many advisors are willing to work with a project between meetings. They can review materials, prepare position statements, provide sites for interns, help with fund-raising efforts, and work on

advocacy activities. Other projects have used them to write curriculum materials, conduct site visits, and provide facilities for training programs.

The ATE program has benefited from involving NVC members in project activities. It makes the advisors more knowledgeable of the project because of their firsthand involvement. Through such experience, the committee members provide better advice, are better able to monitor project progress, and can serve as more knowledgeable advocates of the project.

Evaluation

✓ Evaluate the meeting and the committee process.

As stated in the introduction to this handbook, the goal of National Visiting Committees is to "work with grantees and NSF to help them achieve their goals and objectives." Preparing for and conducting meetings require substantial effort by project staff and consume precious time for advisors. Therefore, it is important that these preparations and meetings produce useful and timely information. The project and committee leaders can ensure the usefulness of the advisor by critically examining the NVC meeting process and results.

One way to do this is to use the NVC Checklist. Making independent judgments about whether or not checkpoints were covered may reveal limitations in areas such as committee organization, planning and conducting the meeting, or post meeting activities. Some checkpoints may require a simple judgment such as "completed" or

"not completed." Others may benefit from more detailed examination to include suggested changes in the manner that checkpoints were addressed.

Advisors might also be asked to assist in a critical review of the meeting. They can address selected checkpoints to identify limitations or make suggested changes. Advisors might complete this review at the close of the meeting or return it later. Alternately, a closing agenda item might be a brief critical discussion of the meeting process and outcomes.

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Concluding Remarks

The preceding list of 42 checkpoints was developed to help those that have responsibility for organizing, planning, conducting, and following up on NVC meetings. It is for the use of committee chairs, project leaders and, to some extent, advisors. We welcome comments or suggestions. Please send them to http://ate.wmich.edu.

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