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An Extension Note on:

EVALUATION FOR ACCOUNTABILITY: A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Evaluation is the process through which program accountability is determined. An "accountable" program meets the priority need of a targeted audience, accomplishes relevant objectives, results in a measurable impact and involves a realistic use of resources.

This paper discusses the issues in determining the accountability of an educational program in home remodeling. A case study of the development of an evaluation package is presented. The package includes two evaluation instruments designed to measure program results and impacts at all levels of Bennett's (1979) evaluation hierarchy. The application of evaluation data from these instruments to measure accountability of the home remodeling program is also discussed.

INTRODUCTION

The role of the Cooperative Extension Service Specialist is to give leadership to an educational program, typically statewide, in a particular subject matter or content area. That leadership role includes evaluation of the program and measurement of its impact.

This paper discusses an approach to evaluation of a statewide program on home remodeling. Issues in evaluation of Cooperative Extension Service (CES) programs, a theoretical base for evaluation and detailed case study of the development and implementation of an evaluation program are presented.

The Purpose of Evaluation

The CES approach of evaluation is to create mechanisms for internal self-study. In order to be successful at self-study, one needs to know what the programs are accomplishing. The self-study should indicate how one can be more responsive to clientele needs, more effective in programming and more efficient in operations (Andrews, 1983).

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The current CES plan for accountability and evaluation is consistent with this approach. Evaluation is the documentation that shows if, and how well, the program met its objectives. Being accountable is being responsible for the program - its planning, development, implementation and results (McKenna, 1983).

Another way to look at accountability and evaluation is to consider accountability as the *results* and evaluation as the *process*. A program that is "accountable" is one that meets a priority need of the targeted audience, accomplishes relevant objectives, results in measurable impact and involves a realistic use of resources. Program "evaluation", through planning, measurement and analysis, measures and documents the criteria for accountability. Thus, one evaluates programs in order to be accountable.

Evaluation can be used both internally and externally. Andrews (1983) describes three categories of use of evaluation.

Program Development. The results of evaluation are fed back into the program planning process to affect, for example, program priorities, audiences targeted, objectives developed and methods selected.

Organizational Management. Evaluation affects the administration of an educational agency in much the same way that it affects program development. Results of evaluation can help administrators prioritize the use of resources, determine staff needs or analyze cost-effectiveness of programs.

Public Relations. In this era of limited resources, public relations are crucial. Evaluation results can be used with a variety of local, state and national groups. These groups include those that expect us to be accountable; such as state legislatures; those that might fund us, such as private foundations; and those that can support us politically, such as industry or commodity groups.

Planning Evaluation

The results of evaluation have a large prospective audience. However, the evaluation must be well-designed, carefully conducted and objectively interpreted to be credible to an audience. In many ways, developing an evaluation is similar to developing a CES program (Patton, 1983). A needs assessment is necessary to determine what information is needed and by whom. Objectives for the evaluation are necessary so that it is clear what information is sought. Appropriate methods must be selected to meet evaluation objectives. Finally, the data are analyzed, interpreted and reported. A carefully planned evaluation is more likely to produce the desired information, be more valid and avoid extraneous information.

To measure the impact of program, one should measure the adequacy of the theory on which it was based and the adequacy of

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the implementation and delivery of the program. One should also be concerned with the adequacy of measurement (Cavendish, 1983). A variety of guidelines can be used to discover if an evaluation plan meets the standards.

Craig (1978) proposes an approach to evaluation based on the assumptions made in planning:

1. Resources needed and available
2. Activities needed to complete strategies
3. Strategies to achieve objectives
4. Objectives relevant to needs

Craig believes that the assumptions made on these four points are integrated into the program plan. Therefore, each point needs to be evaluated in terms of:

1. Appropriateness
2. Adequacy
3. Effectiveness
4. Efficiency
5. Side effects

Her approach allows evaluation to occur before, during and after the implementation of the program.

The strength of this approach is that it puts the emphasis on evaluating if the objectives are met, the methods appropriate and the results cost-effective. What may get overlooked is the actual results. Program impacts are also a key part of evaluation and relate directly to accountability.

Most CES staff are familiar with the evaluation hierarchy developed by Bennett (1979):

1. Inputs
2. Activities
3. People involvement
4. Reactions
5. KASA (knowledge, attitudes, skills, and aspirations) change
6. Practice change

7. End results

The higher on the hierarchy the program results, the greater the program impact. In addition, if the program results are measured at several levels on the hierarchy, the evaluation is stronger and more credible. Higher level and multiple-level program results are also more useful in their applicability to future program decisions. Further, the more "concrete" the measures of program results, the more reliable the measure of impact. Finally, the most effective use of the hierarchy comes when it is used to specify the program objectives and criteria for evaluation before the program is implemented.

CASE STUDY

A continuing major program thrust of the Nebraska Cooperative Extension Service housing program is home remodeling (Parrott, 1984). This is a priority program area and involves considerable staff time and resources. A variety of methods are used, with workshops dominant. However, after the first phase of the program, little was known about the statewide impact except numbers of participants and the fact that most participants liked the program and felt it was worthwhile.

An evaluation package was designed for the home remodeling program. The evaluation was designed with the following purposes:

1. To collect data on how participants were using and applying what they learned.
2. To provide an evaluation for use by both Extension specialists and Extension agents giving uniformity of method and data.
3. To increase the evaluation of home remodeling programs by providing agents with instruments that could be used with minimum preparation time.

The evaluation package was designed for several audiences. First, it was designed for the Extension agent to use in program development and needs assessment. Second, it was created for the agent to use in reporting program accomplishments to Extension administrators and county board members. Third, it was designed for the Extension specialist to use in developing reports of statewide program impacts and accomplishments.

The evaluation package was targeted for use with home remodeling workshop participants. The typical audience was predominantly middle-to-upper-income home owners in their 30s to 50s, with a mixture of urban and rural residents reflective of the workshop location. Because the workshops involved "pencil and paper" activities, a written questionnaire was considered appropriate.

The evaluation package had three parts: 1) an end-of-workshop participant survey, 2) an agent summary form, and 3) a follow-up survey. Each part will be discussed in further detail. Also included

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in the evaluation package was an agent instruction sheet. The total package was introduced and interpreted to agents at district meetings.

End-of-Workshop Survey

The end-of-the workshop survey was developed to be completed in five-to-ten minutes. Two graphic layouts were available, offering the choice of larger type or a single sheet of paper. The survey was designed to be easily adapted for identification of the specific county and workshop. The content of the survey included questions on:

1. How the person learned of the program.
2. Previous involvement with CES programs or the housing industry.
3. Reasons for coming to the program (using a three-point scale measuring priority). Options included planning a remodeling, "dreaming", interest in topic, 4-H or Extension Club activity, class assignment, improve business or meet people.
4. Reactions to the program (using a five-point scale from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree"). Included were expectations, enjoyment of program, instructor, visuals and meeting room.
5. KASA change as related to the specific program objectives (using a five-point scale, as above). Questions asked if the person had more confidence to undertake a remodeling project, a better understanding of the decisions involved in planning the project and increased ability to make these decisions and a greater knowledge of the content of the workshop.

The survey ended with open-ended questions of suggestions for additional program topics and other comments.

Agent Summary

The agent summary form was designed to help agents tabulate and summarize the program evaluations. The results would be a summary to be shared with the Extension specialist, Extension administrators or other local groups. For example, the summarized results of one home remodeling workshop could be used to help convince a local builders group to provide sponsorship for a follow-up program.

The summary form asked the agent to describe and characterize the setting, content and methods of the particular workshop. Methods of publicity, affirmative action data on participants and

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percentage return on evaluations were also requested. The remainder of the summary form repeated the participant survey, but with enough space to be used as a tally sheet.

When the summary form was complete, the agent had most of the data for the first five levels of Bennett's (1979) hierarchy. The agent would also need to refer to his or her own records for Level One. Examples include:

1. Inputs - time spent, cost, materials used, publicity.
2. Activities - type of program, description.
3. People involvement - participants, staff, resource people.
4. Reactions - expectations met, enjoyment, new learnings, approval of instructor preparation, visuals used, facilities.
5. KASA change - confidence gained, understanding achieved, increased ability, greater knowledge.

Using the results of the evaluation, the agent could evaluate the planning assumptions as described by Craig (1978). Some of the questions included:

1. Were the methods and resources used to publicize the program effective? (Compare agent method with how people learned about program).
2. Was the program content relevant to audience needs? (Review questions on reasons for coming to program and reactions).
3. Were the learning objectives accomplished? (Compare objectives to results of questions on KASA change).

At this point, however, the impact of the program was not measured. The workshop evaluation showed what the participants learned and what they planned to do (aspirations), but not what they actually *would* do. The end-of-workshop survey did not measure application or practice adoption.

Follow-up Survey

A follow-up survey was designed to discover how the workshop participants used what they learned. Several difficulties were encountered in designing this survey that were related to the workshop topic. First, participants in a home remodeling workshop might not actually carry out a project for several years. Whether they had actually remodeled their home, within a specific time period, was not a valid measure of the success of the workshop. Second, many of the impacts of the workshop were not economic and,

therefore, were difficult to quantify. For example, as a result of the workshop, an individual might decide he/she did not have the skills to complete a certain aspect of the remodeling project. A professional would be hired at a greater cost to the participant, but the end result was a quality product and greater satisfaction. Third, the decision not to remodel could be a legitimate outcome of the workshop and needed to be measured (Wilkins and DeYoung, 1983). Fourth, planning and conducting a home remodeling project is a complex process. It is likely the workshop attended was only one of several information resources used by the participants.

After consideration of these difficulties, a follow-up survey was designed that would examine the decisions made about a home remodeling project and the influence of the workshop. For those who were actually remodeling (previous experience suggested this would be about one-half of the participants), the effects of the workshop would be considered in such terms as planning, time, money and frustration. In addition, the follow-up survey would be used to gain a better understanding of the audience.

The follow-up survey was designed to be used about six months after the workshop. It could be either a telephone or mail survey. Agents were given a sample cover letter and suggested techniques for sampling and obtaining a high response rate. The content of the survey questions included:

1. Status of the remodeling project/plan and how it had changed since the workshop.
2. For those who had or were planning and conducting a remodeling project:
 - a. type of project
 - b. positive impact of program, such as more time spent in planning or time saved
 - c. negative impact of program, such as not relevant to project or information omitted.
3. Use of CES as an information resource.
4. Other sources of housing information.
5. Characteristics of housing occupied.
6. Demographic information such as age and family composition.
7. Open-ended comments.

As can be seen from the question content, the follow-up survey sought information on practice adoption, program needs and audience characteristics. From the results of the follow-up survey, the agent could move to the top of Bennett's (1979) hierarchy and have documented end results. For example, a practice change would be "more time spent in planning." An end result would be "time saved" in completing the project. Survey results on how the respondents used CES as an information source and favored resources of housing

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information could be applied to future programming. Finally, demographic characteristics would be useful to target audiences and in reporting program results.

The summarized results of the end-of-workshop survey and follow-up surveys document program impacts. By comparing program impacts with assessed needs, looking at the characteristics and number of people served, and considering the cost of the program in staff time and teaching materials developed, it could be determined if the program was accountable. This measure of accountability could be made by an agent for a specific workshop in one county or by the specialist for a statewide series of workshops representing a total program thrust. The documented results could be used both internally and externally, for program development, organizational management and public relations.

THE FUTURE

As a result of some experience with the evaluation package, changes have been made in both the delivery and evaluation of the home remodeling program. Workshops are still the dominant method, but are more in-depth and include individual consultations and involve user fees. The focus has changed from the specialist developing materials and training the agents to lead the workshops, to workshops being developed and taught by the specialist only. Publicity and promotion is both local and statewide and more workshops are being organized on a multi-county basis.

Follow-up evaluation, the weakest, but perhaps the most crucial link, is now being handled by the specialist. For the specialist, the home remodeling program is a top priority. For the agent, home remodeling is one of many programs and may or may not be a top priority. Therefore, as the specialist takes more control for the delivery of the program, he/she needs to take more responsibility for accountability. Follow-up surveys are mailed out, returned to be analyzed by the specialist. Results of the follow-up evaluation is summarized for all county workshops within the program year in order to best measure total statewide program impact.

The design of the evaluation package has turned out to be remarkably flexible. With limited modification, the survey instruments have been adapted for use in programs on kitchen planning, home security, buying a home and renting a home. This adaptation has been accomplished primarily by changing the question of KASA change (end-of-workshop survey) to reflect the content objectives of the particular program. The follow-up survey has required more extensive revision, although the format has remained the same. Questions on CES as an information resource, sources of housing information, housing occupied and demographic information were unchanged.

It is believed that the ready availability of carefully planned and tested evaluation instruments gathering similar data will encourage their use. Further, the more evaluation that is done, the more complete the data and the more accountable are the reports of the Nebraska housing program.

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