Evaluation Strategies for Demonstrating Value in Extension Programming

Kynda R. Curtis, Jo Ann Warner, Martha Sullins
Department of Applied Economics, Utah State University, kynda.curtis@usu.edu
Western Center for Risk Management Education, Washington State University, warnerj@wsu.edu
Colorado State University Extension, Colorado State University, Martha.Sullins@ColoState.edu


Copyright 2013 by Kynda Curtis, Jo Ann Warner, Martha Sullins. All rights reserved. Readers may make verbatim copies of this document for non-commercial purposes by any means, provided that this copyright notice appears on all such copies.
Evaluation Strategies for Demonstrating Value in Extension Programming

Authors: Kynda Curtis, Utah State University; Jo Ann Warner, Washington State University; Martha Sullins, Colorado State University

**Program Background**

**Issue or problem statement:**
- Producers may benefit from the growing demand for local, fresh foods and new market opportunities for specialty crop and livestock products; however, there are information and experience gaps that limit entry and success for new and transitioning small-scale producers.

**Extension program objective:**
- The multi-state Building Farmers in the West program assisted new and transitioning small-scale producers in building economically viable operations by enhancing their business, market, and production planning capacity. The program included eight-week classroom sessions followed by innovative experiential learning opportunities.

**Measuring objective achievement:**
- Participant success at operationalizing new production, input management, harvesting, processing or marketing processes within their business, is measured by evaluating their:
  1. Formal business plans,
  2. Pre-course and post-course assessments
  3. Mentorships or internships in which they engage, and
  4. Follow-up assessments.

**Importance and Purpose**

**Program evaluation:**
- Tracks participant progress towards achieving:
  1. Short-term goals (changes in knowledge, skills and attitude)
  2. Long-term goals (changes in practice; economic and social impacts)
- Encourages participant accountability in learning
- Helps shape and modify program content
- Documents success stories
- Demonstrates value and effectiveness of program effort and resources
- Creates transparency and improves accountability
- Builds statewide and regional program capacity
- Strengthens stakeholder base
- Provides a driver and decision-making tool for future program efforts..."What’s next?"

**Evaluation Methods**

**Three-tiered evaluation approach:**
- **Pre-course assessment** – Completed prior to or on the first day of the course. Measures participant current knowledge, skills, experience, attitudes, and learning goals.
- **Post-course assessment** – Completed on the final day of the course. Measures changes in participant knowledge, skills, and attitudes as a result of course participation, as well as intended practice change.
- **Follow-up assessment** – Completed nine months to one year after course completion (by mail or internet). Measures participant adoption of knowledge/skills, actual practices changes, and impacts to their operation and their communities both economically and socially.

**Example Results**

**Figure 2:** Participant Market Use Pre and Post-Course (Change in Knowledge of Market Risk and Return Characteristics)

**Figure 3:** Completed Business Plan in Course (Course Objective)

**Figure 4:** Participant Practice Change (Percentage Reporting Increases, 1 Year Post Course)