DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE
RESEARCH & EXTENSION
University of Arkansas System

Planning the Comprehensive Extension Educational Program

Planning a comprehensive Extension educational program can be a rewarding experience for people if they are given the opportunity to provide the leadership and actively participate in the planning process.

A lot can be accomplished from programs that have the endorsement and active support of local people. Involvement of people in the planning phase is essential. Otherwise, the program becomes the Extension worker's program rather than the people's program.

Steps in Extension programming are outlined in the model in Figure 1 and are discussed in the following sections.

Studying the County Situation

The purpose of making an analysis of the county situation is to enable committee members to identify existing trends and conditions and compare these with the environmental qualities and conditions that could and should exist. Based upon information about the present condition and the changes needed, the committee can plan a course of action to bring about desired change. As the committee makes this analysis, it will need background information pertaining to local, area, state, national and global conditions.
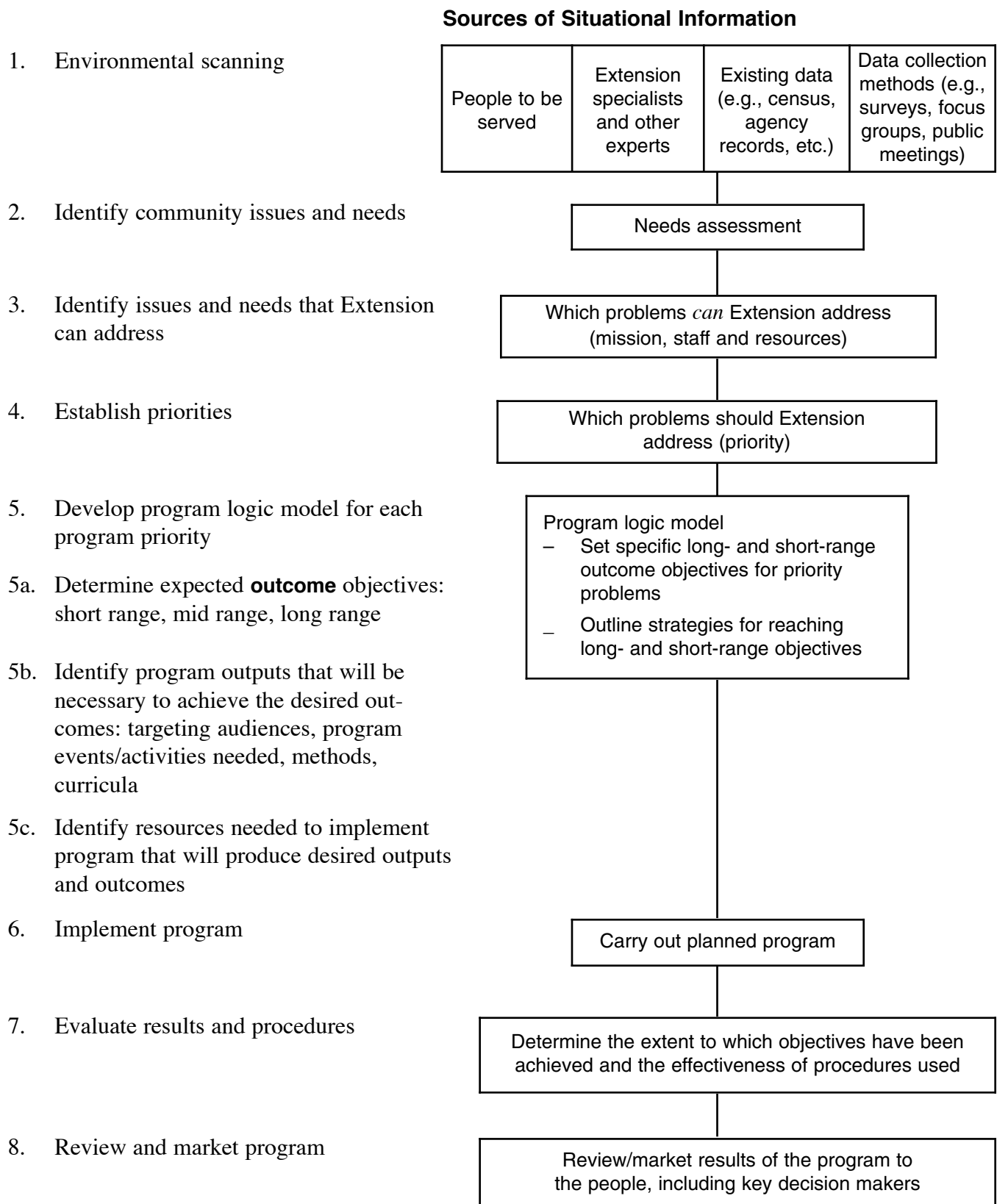
The Kinds of Background Information Needed

1. **General information** about the county that will help committee members obtain an overview of the county, such as accessibility to market industrial centers, transportation, recreation, geographic features, climatic characteristics, historical facts, educational facilities, etc.

2. **Population characteristics** – A study of the population with appropriate comparisons with the population of other counties, the state and the nation is useful in analyzing the situation. Such information as growth trends over several decades, migration patterns, changes in the distribution of rural and urban population, changes in age distribution, and levels of family income are all helpful in the planning process.

3. **Organizations** – The leadership structure of a county is not always obvious. To discover leadership may require careful and systematic analysis of all communities and the organized groups that function within each community. Certain leaders control the business, industry, and finance with considerable influence from political and professional groups. Although many of these leaders may not be members of the planning committee, they do need to understand and be informed about its purpose. An inventory of the organizations and the informal groups in the county is desirable for several reasons. It will reflect how the people are organized for business, professional, social, political, civic, religious, educational, and cultural pursuits. Within these categories, other individuals hold either formal or informal positions. Information gained through an inventory will be useful for the committee as it seeks new members to make the program planning more representative of the people. It will also reveal other important groups or

Figure 1. Steps in Extension Programming

Sources of Situational Information

1. Environmental scanning

People to be served	Extension specialists and other experts	Existing data (e.g., census, agency records, etc.)	Data collection methods (e.g., surveys, focus groups, public meetings)

2. Identify community issues and needs

Needs assessment

3. Identify issues and needs that Extension can address

Which problems *can* Extension address (mission, staff and resources)

4. Establish priorities

Which problems should Extension address (priority)

5. Develop program logic model for each program priority

5a. Determine expected **outcome** objectives: short range, mid range, long range

Program logic model
– Set specific long- and short-range outcome objectives for priority problems
_ Outline strategies for reaching long- and short-range objectives

5b. Identify program outputs that will be necessary to achieve the desired outcomes: targeting audiences, program events/activities needed, methods, curricula

5c. Identify resources needed to implement program that will produce desired outputs and outcomes

6. Implement program

Carry out planned program

7. Evaluate results and procedures

Determine the extent to which objectives have been achieved and the effectiveness of procedures used

8. Review and market program

Review/market results of the program to the people, including key decision makers

individuals who, because of their training, experience, position, and influence, can make valuable contributions as resource people to the planning committee.

4. **Family Life** – Background information on families should indicate present conditions, changing situations, and future needs of families in the county. Comparative studies of information from local, state, and national sources should be made. General population characteristics such as place of residence, age groups, educational levels, levels of family income, sources of income, income distribution, percent of teenage marriages, number of working mothers, number and size of families, mobility of families, organizations for family participation, public facilities, family characteristics and family living patterns will be applicable.

5. **Agriculture** – The agricultural situation needs to be studied from the standpoint of local, area, state, national, and international conditions. Useful information includes land use patterns, trends in number and size of farm units, levels of production, marketing practices and facilities, the nature of capital investment in agriculture, the degree of mechanization, and the labor situation. The analysis of the agricultural situation should help the committee answer these questions about the agricultural economy: What is the relative financial position of agriculture to the total economy of the county? How has agriculture changed in the past 5, 10, or 20 years? What are the projections of agriculture for the next 5, 10, or 20 years? What are the trends for the different, agricultural enterprises in the county? What are the factors contributing to the present trends in agriculture?

6. **Youth Development** – In addition to the information on the total population and family patterns, additional data are needed to identify the needs of youth in the county. In analyzing the youth situation, these following concerns should be considered.

- Number of youth between 5 and 19
- Percent of the population under the age of 20
- Number of active youth-serving organizations and their program thrusts
- Percentage of youth active in youth organizations
- Rate and cause of delinquency
- School dropout rate
- Availability of career counseling or career information
- Job opportunities for youth
- Recreational facilities
- Opportunities for vocational training
- Involvement of youth in community decisions

7. **Community Development**

a. Labor Force – The labor force is an important segment of the population and is influenced by characteristics of the total population. Such types of information that should be considered in this part of the planning process are the size, types, and number of employed and unemployed; percentage of women in the labor force; quality of labor (skilled or unskilled); employment conditions; major occupation groups; major sources of income; labor deficiencies; and employment opportunities.

b. Commerce and Industry – A review of commercial and industrial enterprises in the county is another means of identifying new opportunities. Local chambers of commerce or industrial development groups (where they exist) should give leadership to this phase of the study. Those making the study should seek to identify opportunities for expanding community resources and developing community services that will allow future business development.

c. Local Governments – The extent to which public service meets the needs of local citizens is of interest to the leadership in any county, and information in

this area would be especially useful in developing educational programs to inform the people about the various services available.

d. Environmental and Natural Resources – Many counties have one or more natural resources that may offer opportunities for economic development. Yet, the impact of this development may create a drain upon agricultural and rural lands. An inventory of public and private lands – whether cultivated, pastures, timber, or idle being directed to different uses – would be useful information. Attention should also be given to such resources as:

- Water (both surface and underground) and the changing demands upon it
- Wildlife
- Underground minerals, such as the increase in the number of tapped gas wells, development of lignite, or increased mining of Arkansas coal or diamonds

Procedures for Collecting and Analyzing Background Information

The program area or issue committee should agree on procedures by which all members of the committee and/or subcommittee will be involved in collecting and analyzing information. This is usually accomplished by forming study groups that assume the responsibilities in a particular area of assignment and involving resource people.

The subcommittees collect and analyze all available information in the assigned area of concern. Generally, each subcommittee will follow the procedure listed below. While the actual steps are not essential, most of them will be occurring throughout the process.

1. Focus attention on the known problems and concerns that exist in the subcommittee's area of study and collect

related information. This kind of a beginning will lead the group to collect other information as it sees the need.

2. Look for important facts, conditions, major changes, or significant trends that need to be considered by the committee.

3. Determine what factors are influencing or causing these conditions, trends, or changes.

4. Constantly seek additional information that may shed light on the true situation in the county.

5. Identify other problems and opportunities that are not recognized in the beginning and develop related information.

6. Compile a written statement of findings that will point up new opportunities for major problems that need attention in the county.

7. Recommend long-range objectives directed toward taking advantage of opportunities and solving the problems that were identified in the study.

8. Present the report with appropriate oral explanation to the entire committee.

Determining Problems in Areas of Program Emphasis

The primary purpose of taking a look at the county situation is to identify opportunities for social and economic development in the county. The major problems will become apparent to the planning committee and others involved in the study of the situation. A problem may be defined as any condition or specific situation which careful study has determined that some degree of action or change is needed to bring about improvement. As the planning committee reviews the reports, it will need to list the problems that emerge in the process. In

deciding on the broad areas of program emphasis and problems to receive attention in the county program, the committee should examine each problem in light of these questions:

1. What is the situation that needs to be improved? Who are the people affected?

2. Are those affected by the problem interested in doing something about it? If not, why?

3. Is it practical at this time to do something about it?

4. Are the needed resources available?

5. Is the problem within the purpose and mission of the Cooperative Extension Service?

Establishing Objectives

After the problems, needs, and interests of the people are identified, the committee will then agree on the objectives to be included in the program. An objective should define what a particular group of people expect to accomplish in relation to a specific problem or need. Objectives should clearly identify the target audience and then make a positive statement of what they are to accomplish. An objective will serve a three-fold purpose. It will (1) be a guide for planning an educational action program, (2) give direction to those responsible for carrying out the plan, and (3) provide the basis for measuring the program accomplishments.

Establishing Priorities for Program Implementation

Priorities for program implementation are essential for good planning. Such priorities are actually the decisions the committee makes about the order and urgency with which various problems and objectives are to receive attention. The committee makes these decisions after considering all of the possible alternatives for activating the program. Agreements are

reached about the roles that various people are to play in working toward the objectives. In determining priorities, the committee should point up any specific objectives that deserve top priority within each of the major program areas. In determining how the program will be implemented, the committee should enlist the support of agencies and local groups that have the needed resources to work with the committee to plan and conduct action programs for each of the objectives.

Evaluation and Revision of the Program

An important step in planning a comprehensive county program is that of providing for evaluation and revision of the program. As the committee becomes involved in carrying out the program, progress will be made, conditions will change and, possibly, deficiencies in the plans will be recognized. Useful evaluation of a county program is dependent on the appraisal of each related educational activity. Therefore, each group involved in program implementation should be encouraged to evaluate continuously and report on its own work. With the information gained through this evaluation, the committee will be in a position to measure the accomplishments made in reaching long-range objectives over a period of time. Such evaluation should be used as a basis for making needed revisions in the written program.

In deciding what will be done about evaluation and revision, the following suggestions may be helpful:

Evaluation – Continuous evaluation is essential if the program is to be kept up to date. Evaluation cannot be an afterthought. It must be planned in advance. The following should be considered:

1. Evaluate the planning activities – The value of the county program will depend on the amount and quality of work that has gone into the planning process.

2. Evaluate the results – The ultimate measure of success of the county program is determined by the degree to which each long-range objective is reached. Since the objectives are directed toward solving the problems identified by the people, this kind of evaluation of accomplishments must begin with the actual educational activities conducted in the county. It should (1) determine the degree to which various activities which were planned were actually carried out, (2) reflect the degree to which the target audience made the desired changes, and (3) whenever possible, determine filtering results of the activity on to other audiences. This type of evaluation should determine the degree to which each activity actually achieved its purpose. Was each well planned? What failures were experienced and why? It should reveal how well the activities created interest and "captured the imagination" of the target audience or motivated them to action.

Review of Findings – Each year, the committee should review both the results and changes in the county situation. Subcommittees should report their activities and the results and make any suggestions for needed program adjustments. Sharing this knowledge of progress and results will strengthen and encourage the work of the committee.

Program Revisions – Revisions of the program should be made at any time such needs are recognized. Annual revisions should be made in the comprehensive program and should be reflected in the county plan of work.