

Planning a Program Evaluation

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UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS
DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE
Cooperative Extension Service

Tell a Friend

1) Did you get a mammogram over the past Service Tell a Friend volunteer?

Yes No

(IF YES) - Was this you?

Yes No

What were the results

Mammogram
Found a
Found a
Found a

Do you intend to get a

Yes No

(IF NO) - I didn't get a mammogram

Cost
I was afraid to
No nearby medical facility
No transportation
Just didn't want to

2) Are you aware that women in Arkansas

Yes No

3) Would you like us to have someone mail you information or call you about how you can get a free mammogram?

Yes No

(IF YES) - What is your (phone number and/or mailing address):

4) Has your mother or a sister ever been diagnosed with breast cancer?

Yes No

5) Are you aware that annual mammography is recommended after the age of 40?

Yes No

6) Have you ever given birth to a child?

Yes No

(IF YES) - Was your last child born after you were 30 years old?

Yes No

7) I am:

39 years old or younger
 40-49 years old
 50-59 years old or
 60 years old or older

8) I am:

White, Caucasian
 African American
 Hispanic
 Native American
 Multiracial
 Asian/Pacific Islander
 Other

This survey will help us learn more about the health care needs of Arkansas women.

Thank you again for your time.

The Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service works its programs to all eligible persons regardless of race, color, national origin, religion, gender, age, ability, marital or economic status, and in an Equal Opportunity E.

■ ■ ■ TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	2
Focusing the evaluation	2
What are you going to evaluate?	2
What is the purpose of the evaluation?	3
Who will use the evaluation? How will they use it?	3
What questions will the evaluation seek to answer?	5
What information do you need to answer the questions?	8
Indicators	8
Kinds of information: numerical and narrative	10
When is the evaluation needed?	10
What resources do you need—time, money, people?	10
Collecting the information	11
What sources of information will you use?	11
What data collection method(s) will you use?	11
What collection procedures will you use?	12
Using the information	13
How will the data be analyzed?	13
How will the information be interpreted—By whom?	14
How will the evaluation be communicated and shared?	14
Managing the evaluation	15
Implementing the plan: timeline and responsibilities	15
Budget	15
Finalizing the plan.	15
References	15
Appendices	16

What questions will the evaluation seek to answer?

Make a list of the questions and topics that you and the individuals or groups you have listed want to address. As you do so, review the program's elements. Sometimes programs change as they are implemented; sometimes not all the intended activities are

carried out. Defining appropriate questions to be answered by an evaluation depends upon your knowledge of the program.

The following table lists some typical questions raised in Extension circles.

Table 2. Questions raised about extension programs

<p>About outcomes/impacts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ What do people do differently as a result of the program? ■ Who benefits and how? ■ Are participants satisfied with what they gain from the program? ■ Are the program's accomplishments worth the resources invested? ■ What do people learn, gain, accomplish? ■ What are the social, economic, environmental impacts (positive and negative) on people, communities, the environment? ■ What are the strengths and weaknesses of the program? ■ Which activities contribute most? Least? ■ What, if any, are unintended secondary or negative effects? ■ How well does the program respond to the initiating need? ■ How efficiently are clientele and agency resources being used? <p>About program implementation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ What does the program consist of—activities, events? ■ What delivery methods are used? ■ Who actually carries out the program and how well do they do so? ■ Who participates in which activities? Does everyone have equal access? ■ What is Extension's role; the contributions of others? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ What resources and inputs are invested? ■ How many volunteers are involved and what roles do they play? ■ Are the financial and staff resources adequate? <p>About program context</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ How well does the program fit in the local setting? With educational needs and learning styles of target audiences? ■ What in the socio-economic-political environment inhibits or contributes to program success? ■ What in the setting are givens and what can be changed? ■ Who else works on similar concerns? Is there duplication? ■ Who are cooperators and competitors? <p>About program need</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ What needs are appropriately addressed through Extension education? ■ What are the characteristics of the target population? ■ What assets in the local context and among target groups can be built upon? ■ What are current practices? ■ What changes do people see as possible or important? ■ Is a pilot effort appropriate?
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Many Extension professionals are concerned with outcomes and with documenting evidence that their programs make a difference in peoples' lives. But understanding outcomes requires more than just documenting end results. When that happens, we are left with what has been called the "black box" approach to evaluation—we record outcomes but we don't know what led to them. For example, using a pre-test and post-test demonstrates that something happened (we hope)—not how or why or the role that Extension played. What were the activities? What contribution did Extension make? What factors in the socio-economic context or implementation process influenced the outcomes? Identify those parts that need to be explored relative to your program and situation. At the minimum, documenting Extension's role and resource investments is critical to most evaluations.

Extension plans programs to have certain positive outcomes. However, unanticipated events may occur that result in positive, negative or neutral outcomes. For example, a program to develop a recreational center for youth may result in an increase in street litter and noise; or, an economic development program may result in new investors coming to town who displace local businesses. Or, there may be unexpected positive benefits which are as impressive or more impressive than the planned outcomes. Think about what some *other* effects of your program might be. Create an evaluation that will stay tuned to unexpected results.

Clarifying the evaluation question(s)

As you think about the questions that your evaluation will answer, it may be necessary to break a larger question into its component parts. This will help you fully answer the broader question and begin to identify the information you need to collect. Consider the following examples:

Main question: Who benefits from the program?

Sub-questions: Who actually participates in the program? At what level of involvement?

Who else gains from the program? What do they gain?

How do program participants compare to the county population in general?

Who may be negatively affected? How?

Main question: Is the program duplicating other efforts?

Sub-questions: Of what does the program consist?

What other similar programs exist—of what do they consist?

How are aspects of these programs alike? Dissimilar? Complementary?

What is our particular expertise/niche?

Main question: Did people learn the importance of X?

Sub-questions: Did people know anything about X before attending the program?

Was the environment conducive to learning?

Do any other programs or agencies promote the importance of X?

Table 4. Examples of indicators

Evaluation question	How I will know it? The indicators
Has the expected change in leadership capabilities occurred?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to negotiate when group disagrees • Improved listening skills • Ability to maintain balance between process and task activities • Anything else?
Is water quality improving?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less pollution as a result of improved nutrient management • Balanced species composition in lakes • Anything else?
Are young people learning to communicate effectively?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased confidence in expressing ideas clearly • Improved verbal and non-verbal communication skills • Improved listening skills • Anything else?
Was the collaboration successful?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actions taken as a result of the collaboration • Membership from each segment of the community affected • Roles, rights and responsibilities clearly delineated • Communication is open and frequent • Anything else?

Remember, a program outcome may mean different things to different people. Therefore, the expression of that outcome may be different. For example, volunteers and youth who experience violence in their daily lives are likely to characterize *capable* differently than a rural 4-H club member. Hmong or Native Americans may designate different attributes for *leadership* than participants of Hispanic or European origin. Wherever possible, try to understand the meaning of the program and its outcomes from the participants' perspectives. Include those meanings as the indicators for measuring success.

Also, remember that when you collaborate with other agencies, they may use different indicators. The Department of Natural Resources, for example, might measure *water quality* in terms of bio-physical characteristics, the local Economic Development Group may measure *healthy community* in terms of number of jobs per capita, and the Feed Producer's Association may measure *agricultural profitability* as cost/return ratios.

Collecting the information

Go back and review the questions you wish to ask and the information needed to answer them. Now is the time to think about how you will collect the information.

What sources of information will you use?

Existing information

Remember, you don't always have to go out and collect new data. Explore possible sources of existing information such as other agency records, previous evaluation reports, local service and business reports, WISPOP, the Census Bureau, etc. Printed material about the program (newspaper articles, annual reports and updates, participant logs and records) may be a valuable source of information.

People

The most common source of information is the program's participants and beneficiaries themselves. However, a range of potential "human" sources exist including nonparticipants, proponents and critics; key informants (school principals, court judges, parents of participants, volunteer leaders, etc.—individuals who are likely to know something about the programs and their effects); program staff and collaborators; legislators; funders; and policy makers.

Be sure that the people you identify can actually provide the information you are seeking.

Observations

An underused, but powerful, source of information is the direct observation of program events, activities and results.

Pictorial records

Another powerful source of information is any pictorial record that shows program activities and effects documented in photos, charts, videotapes, and maps.

What data collection method(s) will you use?

Method

When you think about the type of method to use for collecting the information, consider:

- Which method is most likely to secure the information?
- Which method is most appropriate given the values, understandings and capabilities of those who are being asked to provide the information?
- Which method is least disruptive to your program and to your clientele? Asking questions can be intrusive, time-consuming and/or anxiety-provoking.
- Which method can you afford and handle well?

The *best way* to collect data often depends upon an understanding of the social, cultural and political environment.

- Some participants may not feel comfortable responding over the telephone or in a written format. You will need cultural sensitivity to link an appropriate data collection technique with diverse respondents.
- If, in the past, only 20% responded to your mail survey, you will need to decide whether that is an adequate representation. Can you get more useful information from another method?

In Extension, we've tended to rely on surveys, tests and end-of-session questionnaires.

Currently, focus group interviews are gaining popularity. Altogether there are a variety of techniques from which to choose (see table 5). Select the method which suits your purpose—don't let the method determine your approach. Be creative and experiment with various techniques.

We tend to think of sampling in terms of people. One can also take a sample of documents, program sites or locations. For example, rather than collecting information from all the county 4-H clubs, you may wish to focus your resources and take a random sample of clubs. Or, you may want to stratify your sample by age, club activity, or location. To do so will require particular attention to your sample size and selection. In other cases, you may wish to learn about select groups without needing to generalize to all the groups. Then, a **nonprobability sample** is appropriate.

Consider the kind of sample and size that will be most credible to those you want to pay attention to the findings.

Note: Some professional evaluators argue that it is better to sample and use several data collection techniques in an evaluation than to expend all your resources on collecting data from the entire population using a single instrument. Also, political concerns may need to be considered. For example, political officials or legislators may only see the evaluation as credible if it includes their district or a large number of respondents.

Who will collect the data?

You may be the only one collecting information, but more and more frequently, others are also involved in evaluation—particularly in data collection. Training or support may be needed to help them do their job.

What is the schedule for data collection?

- When will the information be available?
- When can the information be conveniently collected? When will it be least disruptive?
- Where will the information collection take place?
- When will data collection start and end?

Consider your respondents. Convenient times and places are likely to differ depending upon whether your respondents are farmers, business owners, men, women, single parents, school teachers, or some other group. Likewise, there may be culturally appropriate meeting times and locations.

A sample worksheet in Appendix B covers the “information” aspects of planning an evaluation.

Using the information

Evaluation involves more than just collecting information. The information must be organized and presented in a way that permits people to understand it.

How will the data be analyzed?

Organizing, tabulating and analyzing your data to permit meaningful interpretation takes time and effort—often, more time and effort than you’d expect. Factor this in when you design your evaluation. If resources are limited, you may want to structure your evaluation to be smaller, rather than larger.

The aim of data analysis is to synthesize information to make sense out of it. Different techniques are appropriate depending upon whether you have qualitative (narrative, natural language) or quantitative data (numerical data).

Consider such questions as:

- How will responses be organized/tabulated? By hand? By computer?
- Do you need separate tabulations from different locations or groups?
- What, if any, statistical techniques will be used?
- How will narrative data be analyzed?
- Who will organize and analyze the information?

Appendix A

Example showing indicators for different levels in an extension program.

Program level	Expected achievements	Indicators
7. Impact	Town makes development decision based on good planning techniques.	Need for zoning clarified. Town adopts comprehensive plan. Effective moratorium on condos. Citizen satisfaction.
6. Actions	Individuals use skills or knowledge; board works better with other town departments; new relationships are formed.	Planning board creates and proposes comprehensive plan, functions as a cohesive unit, schedules sessions with decision makers; new working relationships evolve.
5. Learning	Acquire sufficient knowledge about planning and skills with group process. Develop positive attitudes about planning. Choose to act.	Community planning techniques learned. Group functioning understood. Process noted informally among members and Extension staff.
4. Reactions	Group members maintain level of interest and accept leadership responsibilities. Extension staff role is appropriate.	Progress is made, deadlines kept. Board takes initiative in planning process. Group is satisfied with progress and Extension's role.
3. Participation	Appropriate people are involved as members and as technical resources.	Broad-based representation; each member accepts part of the work; appropriate resource people (technical and key community leaders) take part.
2. Activities	Needs assessment; facilitate prioritization process; four meetings.	Needs assessment completed. Problems defined and written. Objectives and priorities set.
1. Inputs	Volunteer/ citizen participation; 100 hours Extension time; specialist input.	Public or official support and sanctions; agreement (contract) made between group and Extension staff; group membership established; contract formed if necessary.

Appendix D

The Gantt Chart

Gantt Chart is a simple display that includes proportionate, chronologically scaled time-frames for each evaluation task. The chart provides an overview of the entire evaluation process that illustrates when evaluation activities will begin and how long each will continue.

Vertical axis lists the tasks to be completed.

Horizontal axis shows a time scale.

A **horizontal line** is drawn for each task to show how long it will take.

Milestones (important interim deadlines) are keyed with symbols.

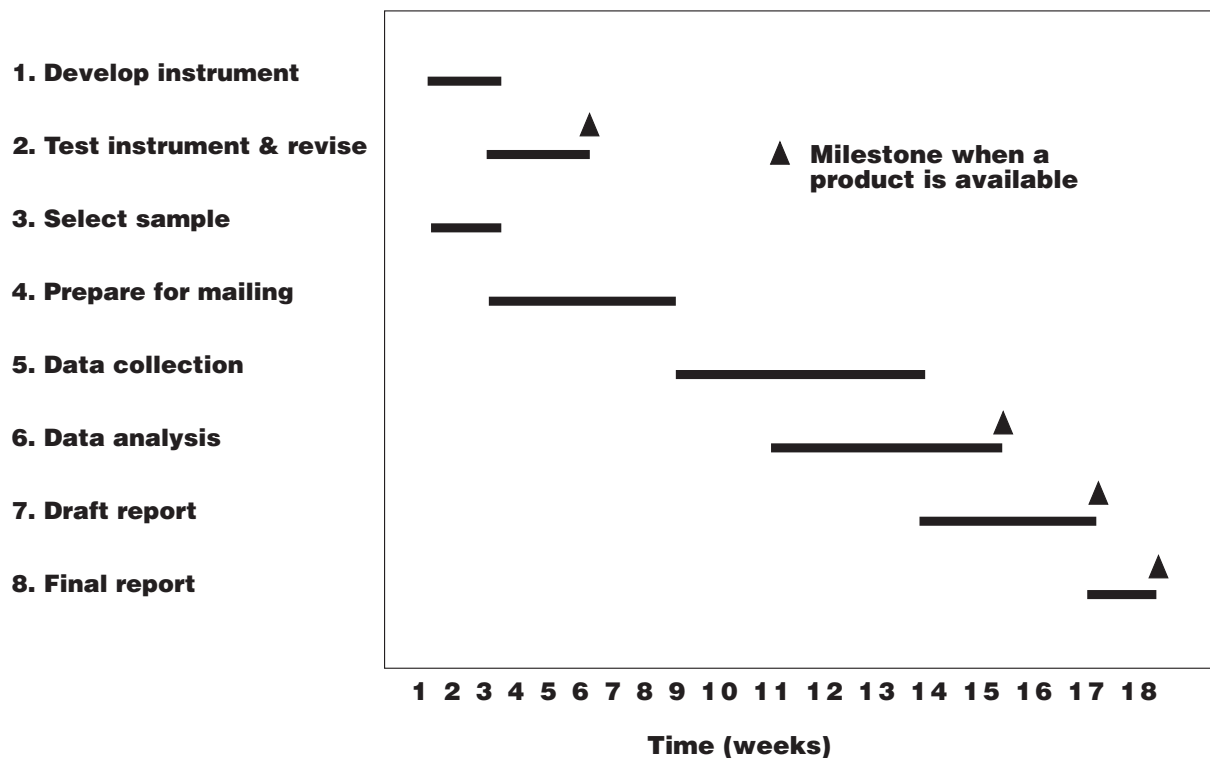
Uses

1. Communicates evaluation plan to a non-technical audience; therefore it is useful in proposals or reports.
2. Helps in time management since it forces one to examine the length of time each project task will require, to contemplate the overlap between tasks, and to establish a realistic timeframe for the entire project.

A Gantt chart reflects the evaluator's planning. Although it is easy to prepare, it is useful only when all evaluation steps are accounted for within realistic time frames. One must allow sufficient time for each step in the evaluation process—starting from focusing the evaluation through the final report.

Source: Rockwell, 1993. Module 8.9 based on Worthen and Sanders, 1987, pp. 256-257.

Figure 1. Example of a Gantt Chart



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