Ask the OEIE Evaluator

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6/24/2014

Ask the OEIE Evaluator:
Creating Stakeholder Friendly Documents: Data Visualization

A variety of data visualization techniques can be used to explain a process, present results, or demonstrate impact. In this installment, we discuss how to create an easy-to-follow one-page graphic timeline.

Q: How do I create a stakeholder friendly graphic that helps demonstrate my program's impact?

While comprehensive reports often contain tables, charts, graphs or other visuals, creating a one-page graphic representation of your program may resonate with readers more strongly, especially if you are trying to illustrate an entire process, collection of activities, or program outcomes and impacts. There are numerous data visualization techniques that allow for the presentation of large amounts of data, in a concise, easy-to-read, visually pleasing format. Examples of these techniques include word clouds, GIS maps, and social network analysis, but one of the easiest one-page data visualizations for you to create and for stakeholders to follow is a data visualization timeline. This type of graphic conveys a snapshot of a program to an audience.

When creating a graphic timeline it is important to first determine the timeframe of interest as well as whom the timeline's audience will be. Display the results to pertinent questions the audience would want answered. Ask yourself which data is most important to them? Or what is most important to

represent or highlight about your program to stakeholders? The following steps will guide you through the process.

Step 1 – Collect data such as participation numbers, number of programs offered, pre- and post-assessment results that measure knowledge/skills gained, or post-assessment results measuring participant satisfaction.

Step 2 – Analyze data for milestones, themes, or significant findings. Consider using quotes from participants to highlight specific activities, knowledge/skills gained or satisfaction with a program.

Step 3 – Use software that is easily accessible. Templates for creating timelines can be found in Word, Excel, Publisher, and PowerPoint.

Step 4 – Create your timeline. Use text boxes and graphic elements to highlight milestones, themes, and significant findings either by using the shapes and text boxes provided in the template you've chosen or by adding additional graphic elements. Below are some additional things to keep in mind as you begin to construct your timeline:

- Document size – make sure that the data will fit with easy readability.
- Timeframe – timelines can span a week, a month, quarters, a year, or years.
- Use of basic shapes and connectors – located in the insert tab of a word document.
- Use appropriate colors – if your program has a logo, make sure that you use those colors or complimentary ones.
- Be consistent with your use of fonts, colors, bullets, and graphics.
- Adding pictures from activities personalizes the timeline.
- Allow your creative side to show – utilize various shapes and colors or bold text to emphasize certain aspects of your timeline.

An example of a data visualization timeline is provided on the *Extension Evaluation Resources* website. We created this graphic in Word by inserting Shapes, SmartArt, and Text Boxes into a blank document. This one-page document highlights all 11 Program Focus Teams (PFTs), and documents things such as participation rates, number of programs, and impacts/outcomes using sample data.

Remember data visualizations can be stand-alone documents or accompany reports to highlight findings. You may also find that your visual encourages stakeholders to read the full report. The ultimate goal is to create a one-page document that provides your audience with a complete picture of the program or activity with data that is important to them.

Questions about evaluation? Visit the Extension Evaluation Resources website (http://apps.oeie.ksu.edu/extension/index.php) or contact Allison Teeter at amt8968@ksu.edu or 785-532-0640, at OEIE.

5/6/14

Collecting Follow-Up Impact Data Using K-PICS

In this installment, we discuss a few tips on collecting follow-up data from participants several weeks or months after their program participation and how K-PICS can make this evaluation activity more manageable.

Q: How can I use K-PICS to collect follow-up impact data from participants several weeks or months after their initial participation?

When evaluating programs, most often the evaluation is conducted at the conclusion of the program, typically, with an end-of-program survey. While these immediate activities can provide valuable information about the short-term impacts of your program, such as participant gains in knowledge or new attitudes, you may increase the value of your evaluation significantly by continuing your efforts a few months after the program. By collecting follow-up data from your participants, you may learn how participants *applied* new knowledge, skills, or attitudes to make *behavioral changes*.

Seeking to gather contact information, such as addresses, emails, or telephone numbers, from participants at the initial point of contact can allow for the possibility of conducting a successful follow-up evaluation, as well as a thoughtful approach using one of a variety of options such as an invitation to an in-person interview or observation, or a telephone interview, or mail-in or online survey. Sampling a portion of your participant group for interviews, observations, or surveys, rather than contacting your entire group should its size be large, may also make follow-up evaluations much more practical. Limiting your follow-up to a few key questions may make it easier for both you to conduct the follow-up and for your participants to complete, reducing their time and commitment to the process. Additionally, if available, a small incentive can motivate participation in your follow-up, increasing the numbers of participants you may have targeted.

With a few simple actions, you can make this valuable evaluation step more manageable using K-PICS, which provides pre-developed evaluation templates and an organized method of entering and analyzing follow-up data for your use in a variety of ways to report program impacts.

Using K-PICS, you can plan and generate your follow-up evaluation materials at the same time you generate your initial evaluation materials. By consecutively generating these in K-PICS, you ensure that your priorities for the entire program evaluation remain consistent and complementary to the program area. The following program areas currently have follow-up templates available in K-PICS that may be applicable to your program:

- Adult Development and Aging
- Crop Production
- Natural Resources
- Nutrition, Food Safety and Health
- FNP SNAP-Ed

Visit the *Manage Evaluation Instruments* area of K-PICS to generate a follow-up instrument that is specific to the needs of the program you are delivering and based on pre-developed templates. You can access these pre-developed follow-up templates by going to the *Impact Data* section and clicking *Manage Evaluation Instruments* in the upper left corner. Look for the *New Instrument* button to begin the process. For step-by-step instructions on how to generate an evaluation instrument in K-PICS, visit the *Support* section, which houses the K-PICS User Manual, past K-PICS training webinars, and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs).

You will need to enter the collected follow-up data into K-PICS within the same program that housed the initial evaluation data, as creating a new program to enter this follow-up data would duplicate program and participant numbers. Data collected and entered into K-PICS can then be accessed using the *Individual Data Extractions* feature within the *Reports & Analysis* section. For help with K-PICS, contact our K-PICS Support Team at 785-532-5138 or kpics@oeie.ksu.edu.

Questions about evaluation? Visit the Extension Evaluation Resources website (http://apps.oeie.ksu.edu/extension/index.php) or contact Kathleen Gary, ksgary@ksu.edu or 785-532-5127, at OEIE.

3/18/14

Implementation Fidelity and Adaptation, Striking the Balance

In the previous *Ask the OEIE Evaluator* installment, we discussed implementation fidelity across seven areas of focus when considering consistency of program delivery according to design. In this installment, we provide guidance on areas of acceptable program adaptations and ones to avoid.

Where can I make program adaptions, while at the same time staying true to implementation fidelity?

While we don't want to stray far from the developer's recommended program or curriculum implementation guidelines in order to increase the likelihood of producing the desired results, we recognize that many educators may face the tension of changing the program's content or delivery method to fit a particular need. Typical needs fall within population variations and program relevance or limited time and resources.

It is always a good idea to consult with the developer of the program or curriculum before making any changes as a first step. Chances are the developer may have information already available on how best to make adaptations, while ensuring consistency of program delivery. In absence of developer guidance, it is prudent to document changes to track what has been done in case you need to revisit core implementation components of the program. Be sure to include extra planning time to make changes or add evaluation activities to assess the impact of the adaptations.

Adaptations to Accommodate

- ***Language or Cultural References of Target Audience***: Translating, interpreting, amending words or phrases or substituting cultural differences to ensure that the language expressed, written, seen, or spoken or the cultural reference inferred is identifiable to the targeted program participants can help assure adequate engagement.
- ***Images of Target Audience within Materials****:* Swapping out images to more accurately reflect the target audience may boost enrollment or broaden the appeal of the program or curriculum.
- ***Aspects of Delivery***: Incorporating variations with some aspects of participants' activities to be responsive to the culture of the target audience may more aptly reflect accepted social norms and increase participant involvement.
- ***Enhancements within Content****:* Adding relevant content (either evidence- or practice-based) or other supportive materials, such as out-of-class projects or assignments, may further enhance the experiential learning or mastery of content and expand upon the learning concept.

Changes to a program or curriculum that may take the manner of removing, abbreviating, or reorganizing a program's content or composition is probably not a good idea. It may diminish the learning experience and interfere with program outcomes.

Adaptations to Avoid

- ***Dosage***: Reducing the number of lessons or sessions, the amount of time given to each lesson/session, or the period of time in which participants are engaged in the program may limit participants' exposure to the material to be learned and compromise intended results. Additionally, elimination of proscribed topics, topic sequence, key messages, or critical skill building components could inadvertently remove essential features of the program that makes it work.
- ***Delivery***: Repressing the extent of participant interaction could minimize practicing a new skill or demonstrating a key concept. Using fewer educators than recommended may lower the ratio of educators to participants, and thereby decrease opportunity for group or individual exchange. And, changing the assumptions or framework of how the program should work may unintentionally shift the purpose of the program.
- ***Provider Training/Qualifications***: Using staff or volunteers who are not adequately trained or qualified may lessen the quality of program implementation.

For sources on this article or to read more about program fidelity and adaptation, please visit the Extension Evaluation Resources website.

Questions about evaluation? Visit the Extension Evaluation Resources website or contact Kathleen Gary, ksgary@ksu.edu or 785-532-5127, at OEIE.

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Implementation Fidelity

When seeking to demonstrate program outcomes, it is important to pay attention to how consistently a program is delivered according to design. In this installment, we discuss implementation fidelity.

What is implementation fidelity? What areas of focus can help me reflect on program delivery?

Implementation fidelity is the degree to which a program or curriculum is delivered as intended by the developer(s). The integrity of the delivery to its prescribed details (i.e., operating manual, instructor's guide) can directly influence the outcomes, such as the extent of knowledge or skill gained or behavioral changes achieved, aimed for by the program or curriculum. The more closely aligned your delivery to the program or curriculum model, the more likely your chances of producing the same results as promised by the developer.

When considering implementation fidelity, one such guideline encompasses seven basic areas of focus (Principles of Effectiveness, SDFSCA, 1998). When reflecting on your program(s), ask yourself how strongly your program adheres to these seven areas in the research that provided evidence of effectiveness for that particular program.

- ***Target Audience***: Check if the target audience varies from the one in the original curriculum or program design. The demographics, developmental, linguistic, or other population characteristics should be similar.
- ***Setting****:* Look to see if the setting is conducive to the instructional activities, projects or application of knowledge as specified in the manual, work plan, or teaching module. The environment should be one that resembles the approach identified within the original model that suggests an optimal learning experience.
- ***Materials***: Assess if the appropriate materials were used or if modifications were made. The content should match the learning capabilities of the audience you are working with, use language that is easily interpreted, and include supplies that convey the ideas to be absorbed and practiced by participants.
- ***Delivery***: Reflect on the consistency of delivery against the model. The instructional style should be those illustrated in the instructor's reference materials (e.g., skills modeling, coaching, etc.). Another component for review may be the sequence of delivery, the particular order of topics covered. Building on the skills, for example, from the class prior may be important to the overall skill achievement at the end of the program. Check to see if that sequence was maintained or changed.

- ***Dosage***: Probe to see if the program was delivered in the amount of time and with the frequency recommended. The number and frequency of lessons, as well as the length of time should match the intended project duration. Simple questions that explore if all the lessons intended were delivered may reveal some clues about how fully a program or curriculum was delivered. If the length of time for the instruction or practice as specified was curtailed or a few lessons were picked to teach over the total may help you identify where your dosage may be off.
- ***Provider Qualifications***: Reflect to see if the qualifications that educators bring promote the learning experience of the participants involved. This area of fidelity check should address any special credentials or other qualifications required of the person teaching the lessons. Investigate if a trained volunteer or program assistant can implement the program or if a content specialist is needed to implement a segment required of the lessons planned.
- ***Provider Training***: Assess what kind of training might be needed to deliver the content or skills required of the subject matter to be taught. Examine the original published instruction manual that should guide any training needs of the person teaching the lesson to see if any training was missed.

Continuing this theme, look for our next installment to learn more about *Implementation Fidelity and Adaptation, Striking the Balance*.

Questions about evaluation? Visit the Extension Evaluation Resources website (http://apps.oeie.ksu.edu/extension/index.php) or contact Kathleen Gary, ksgary@ksu.edu or 785-532-5127, at OEIE.

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Comparing Survey Designs

This installment of Ask the OEIE Evaluator was originally developed for and published in the December 20, 2011 edition of the Tuesday Letter.

Asking participants to participate in a survey and complete a questionnaire is a common strategy for evaluating the impact of extension programs. There are different designs you may consider for a survey, each with its own set of advantages and disadvantages. In this installment of *Ask the OEIE Evaluator,* we discuss three survey designs.

Q: Should I conduct a pre- and post-test? Just a post-test? A retrospective post-then-pre? How do I decide?

These three survey designs –*pre-test post-test, post-test only*, and *retrospective post-then-pre* – differ in the timing in which participants complete the survey and in the kinds of information sought at that time. Accordingly, each design presents particular advantages and disadvantages.

With a *pre-test post-test* design, participants are asked to complete a questionnaire at the beginning of a program and then again at the end. These questionnaires typically include some or all of the same question items so that you can compare responses after their participation in the program to their response prior to participation. The main advantage of a pre-test post-test is that you may infer the effect of your program on changes in reported attitudes, knowledge, and perhaps behaviors, based on participants' responses "pre" to "post." However, one significant disadvantage of this design is the possibility of participants remembering or learning from the pre-test, especially if the time between the pre- and the post- is relatively short, and thus responding to the post-test based on that and not what they gained from the program. And, sometimes participants can actually learn from the program that they did not know as much about a topic before as they thought they did, and thus respond lower in the post-test than the pre-test! This is called a *"response shift bias."*

When there are concerns about the time, energy (yours or participants'), and resources needed to do both a pre-test and post-test, you may sometimes choose a *post-test only* design. While this may be easier to implement, the post-test design only allows you to assess participants' reported knowledge, attitudes or behaviors *after* the program. This makes it difficult to consider how this may compare to before participation, and thereby, determine the actual effect of your program. Sometimes you can gain a sense of the program effect if you can also gather information from non-participants or identify comparable information (e.g., results from a published study).

Much like the post-test only design, the *post-then-pre retrospective* survey design is both time and cost effective. It is administered at the end of the program and contains questions about the participant's knowledge and behavior after, but also *before,* having participated in it. By asking participants to reflect back on their knowledge and behavior before the program and to compare that to after the program, the post-then-pre retrospective design can be similar to the pre-test post-test design in that it can allow for inference of the effect of their program on changes in knowledge, attitudes, and/or behavior. This design can also help control response shift bias. However, the post-then-pre retrospective is not without its own limitations. For example, participants (especially children) may not always be able to accurately recall the requested information. Additionally, participants may report a change even if one did not occur simply because they know they were supposed to change. This is one form of *self-report bias* that can occur with the use of the post-then-pre retrospective design.

Questions about evaluation? Visit the Extension Evaluation Resources website (http://apps.oeie.ksu.edu/extension/index.php) or contact Kathleen Gary, ksgary@ksu.edu or 785-532-5127, at OEIE.

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Stakeholder Considerations to Presenting Evaluation Results

We focused on tips to displaying types of impact data in the previous *Ask the OEIE Evaluator* installment. In this installment, we shift our focus to a few elements you'll want to consider when presenting to stakeholders the findings derived from your evaluation efforts. This information may be useful for any evaluation effort that involves the presentation of evaluation results, conclusions, or recommendations.

Q: What should I take into consideration when presenting evaluation results to stakeholders?

Program evaluation aims to understand progress toward and the achievement of identified outcomes as they relate to the overarching mission and goals of the program. Therefore, it is vital to present the evaluation results, conclusions, or recommendations obtained through the evaluation process in a manner that is both useful and understandable to your stakeholders. Stakeholders have varying degrees of interest and engagement with evaluation findings, so it is important that the presentation of evaluation results address their individual needs.

The informational needs of the stakeholders typically enlighten the development of evaluation questions at the beginning of the evaluation process. The evaluation questions then guide the entire evaluation planning process, including when and how you collect impact data, what type of analysis may best address evaluation questions with the data collected, and when reporting needs should occur. Thus, a return to these evaluation questions is your first consideration and should be a key focus in your stakeholder presentation. In order for information to be most useful, your presentation should isolate the most salient findings relevant to the questions posed. Another consideration to increase the understanding of evaluation results is to present findings of both intended and unintended outcomes of your program. This, in many cases, provides for a richer understanding of impact. For example, if a healthy eating program that was targeted to middle school youth had unintentionally influenced high school youth, too, it is important to include these sorts of findings in your presentation to demonstrate larger impacts. Additionally, addressing whether an outcome meets an immediate or longer or more broad-based need contributes to the varying levels of program achievement that may be expected by stakeholders.

Another consideration is to be aware of and thoughtful to the contextual setting in which your program lives. For example, social and economic conditions, institutional climate (e.g., perceptions, attitudes, or expectations of current events), or political circumstance (e.g., capitalizing on the release of a special initiative similar to your work), may delay or inspire the timing of your presentation to stakeholders.

An often overlooked consideration is the language and terminology used in presentations. Specifically, program jargon and complex terminology should be avoided unless it is used by the stakeholders

themselves. Simple language and added graphic representations of data both enhance the ability of stakeholders to read and interpret the evaluation results more easily as well as facilitate the use of the findings.
Finally, the mode or forum of presentation is another important consideration. To ensure that impact is not lost on your stakeholders, the vehicle and place of the presentation should be suited to the stakeholder you intend to address. Taken together, careful preparation in presenting evaluation results that meet the needs of varying stakeholders may provide the information needed to continue stakeholder commitment, enthusiasm, and engagement in the program's mission and goals.

Questions about evaluation? Visit the Extension Evaluation Resources website or contact Kathleen Gary, ksgary@ksu.edu; or Mandi Peters, mpeters8@ksu.edu; at OEIE.

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Displaying Evaluation Results

You have several methods at your disposal to display your evaluation results, and there is not one "right" way. However, all "right" ways will focus on clearly presenting the results in a way that leads to an accurate interpretation of the data and in a manner that is most useful to the audience. In this installment, we cover options to help you make informed choices on displaying data.

Q: How should I present my data?

No matter the type of data, quantitative or qualitative, the way you display the data needs to be interesting and relevant to your audience. An executive brief with bullet points and a couple of charts that display your key findings may be the best approach with advisory boards. A PowerPoint presentation largely focused on graphic displays will quickly convey important information from your evaluation to a group of community members.

Quantitative data can be presented in narrative text, tables, and charts. Try to keep your data presentation simple. It can be sufficient to present results in the text for items that have relatively few levels of information (for example, gender or age groups). Tables help organize several pieces of data to make it easier for the reader to process. For example, crops grown or livestock raised have several bits of information to organize that may be difficult for your audience to read in a paragraph. You may also choose organizational strategies, such as sorting the response options from most to least frequently selected, to make data in tables even easier to process.

Charts may make it be easier to see differences or trends. Select the chart type that most clearly

displays the data in a format that is legible and easy to read and decipher, and that accurately portrays the data.

- Bar charts are usually effective for comparing data. For example, if you place pre- and post-participation results into a bar chart, it will be very easy for your audience to compare these results and see the impact of participation.
- Pie charts should be used to show pieces of a whole, such as the breakout of participants' educational and income levels.
- Line charts are a clear way to present trends over time.

Qualitative data are typically analyzed and organized (coded) by themes, general descriptive topics designed to encompass multiple responses. Coding these comments into overarching themes allows you to understand the topics of focus for your participants, as well as allowing you to succinctly summarize these comments to your stakeholders. When few themes have emerged, a sensible choice is to list these themes within the text. On the other hand, if there are many themes, a good choice is to present these themes in a table or a bulleted list. Another decision may be whether or not to display how often (frequency) you identified each theme in the responses. The inclusion of frequency can provide a general idea of the relative importance of each theme. If you provide frequencies along with the themes, it is important to explain the method used to obtain the number (coded themes within responses) and what it represents (number of respondents providing a comment that supports the theme).

Including a few select quotes as illustrative examples offers more context in interpreting the themes. You can choose to provide *all* supporting quotes or a *sample* of quotes. This choice may be guided by the total number of responses and/or the distinctiveness of responses within a theme, as well as how you'll display the data. A combination of sample quotes within the narrative and the inclusion of a full list of quotes in an appendix may be ideal for situations where you want to be brief, but also need to include all of the fine details. If presenting to a group, you may choose to share a few charts and quotes that support your key findings, and then share a report of the full findings afterwards.

Questions about evaluation? Visit the Extension Evaluation Resources website or contact Kathy Gary, ksgary@ksu.edu, 785-532-5127; or Mandi Peters, mpeters8@ksu.edu, 785-532-0648; at OEIE.

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A Method to Determine Differences Between Groups

The worksheet Analyzing Program Impacts: Data Analysis Plan, which accompanied the October 2011 installment of Ask the OEIE Evaluator, illustrates a variety of techniques that you can use to analyze the results gathered by your evaluation instruments. In this installment we take a closer look at the technique known as cross-tabulation, also often referred to as crosstabs. Crosstabs is an analysis technique that can be used to assess differences between two groups of participants (for example, youth and adults).

Q: How do I determine if there is a difference between two groups of participants?

One method used to determine if there are differences between two groups of participants is cross-tabulation, or crosstabs. This particular method of analysis will allow you to examine your participants' answers to two or more questions at the same time by showing you the distribution of responses for two of your survey questions in a table or matrix format, where the rows provide the different groups you want to compare and the columns present the frequency of each group's responses to a particular question in your evaluation instrument.

Participant groups could be determined by demographics or responses to a question within your instrument. For example, you could use gender, male and female, as your participant groups; or you could group participants that responded 'Yes' to an initial question in one group and those that responded 'No' to that same question in your second group. Labels for the groups and the total number of participants in each group are placed in separate cells in the first column. Then each possible selection is placed in header cells of the proceeding columns. Finally, the frequency and percentage of each group's responses to each of the available selections are calculated and placed in the appropriate rows and columns.

By placing your data in a crosstab you can easily compare the responses in a way that reveals differences and similarities between the groups, as well as within a group. The results of a crosstab analysis can provide you with information you can use for programmatic improvement and to indicate impact related to specific audiences participating in these programs.

What follows is an example of a crosstab table/matrix and a description of what information can be obtained from the crosstab.

	Website	Radio	TV	Newspaper
Youth N=328	54.3% n=178	7.6% n=25	28.9% n=95	9.1% n=30
Adults N=328	32.0% n=105	51.2% n=168	7.0% n=23	9.7% n=32

This particular crosstab table is being used to examine the relationship between the participant age group and their responses to a question asking how they found out about the program: website, radio, TV, and newspaper. Each cell in the table shows the percentage of respondents choosing a particular combination of responses to the two items of interest. In other words, each cell contains a single crosstab.

By examining the crosstab table above we can see that while youth participants were most likely to report they found out about the program via the website, adult participants were more likely to report that they heard about the program on the radio. The crosstab table also tells us which media the youth and adults in our participants were least likely to find out about the program (radio and TV, respectively). Using this information, we can then improve our advertising methods to reach our target audience(s) for specific programs.

Crosstabs can help you examine the influence of one variable, such as age group, on another, such as methods of advertising, and can be a fast way to draw some additional conclusions about the data you have collected.

Questions about evaluation? Visit the Extension Evaluation Resources website or contact Kathleen Gary (ksgary@ksu.edu, 785-532-5127) or Mandi Peters (mpeters8@ksu.edu, 785-532-0648) at OEIE.

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Using Microsoft Excel for Data Management and Analysis

As Extension professionals collect program evaluation data, they may have questions related to data management and analysis. Many software packages exist to assist with data management and analysis, but Microsoft Excel may be one of the most widely available packages in university and Extension locations, and this software is appropriate for Extension professionals' analytic needs. This installment discusses use of Microsoft Excel for data management and analysis.

Q: How do I use Excel to manage and analyze evaluation data?

You frequently collect data through surveys. These surveys may contain both quantitative (i.e., data in numbers or that can be coded into numbers, like "yes" = 1 and "no" = 0) and qualitative data (i.e., open text responses). Here are tips for entering data into Microsoft Excel and some direction on basic analysis for each type of data.

To prepare for data entry, the Excel sheet must be formatted to accommodate the data. First, type each survey question across the top of the sheet (i.e., in row 1) in its own column. Most survey questions require only one column, but if you have multiple choice questions that allow respondents to select more than one option (i.e., select all that apply), these questions require a separate column for each response option.

After setting up the sheet, you can start data entry. Enter each participant's responses as a separate row in the sheet. So, if 30 participants returned a survey, the sheet will contain 30 rows of data. Qualitative data from open-ended questions should be entered verbatim, whereas quantitative data from multiple choice and scale items should be entered as numerical codes. These codes will represent the response option and allow for the calculation of statistics (e.g., frequencies, means).

Numerical codes can be assigned in a variety of ways, but the following guidelines may help:

- For multiple choice items where only one response can be selected, assign the first option a code of "1", the second option a "2", and so on.
- For multiple choice items that allow the selection of more than one option, a "1" should be entered if that option is selected. If the option is not selected, enter a "0" or leave that cell blank.
- When assigning codes to scale items, it helps in the interpretation of means, or averages, to assign codes so that a higher number represents the more positive end of the continuum (for example, 1 = Disagree, 2 = Neither Disagree nor Agree, 3 = Agree).

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	**Respondents**	**I am now motivated to schedule time to accomplish some financial disaster prevention tasks.** [Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5)]	**Make a list of well-defined goals and actions I need to take to get financially prepared for a disaster.** [Multiple Choice single selection]	**I have completed a household inventory (written)** [Multiple Choice multiple selection]	**I have completed a household inventory (photo)** [Multiple Choice multiple selection]	**I have completed a household inventory (video)** [Multiple Choice multiple selection]	**Additional comments shared on back of sheet.**
2	Respondent 1	5	3	1	0	0	I learned soooooo much
3	Respondent 2	4	3	1	1	1	
4	Respondent 3	5	1	1	0	1	none

[More detailed examples of data entered into Microsoft Excel can be found on the Extension Evaluation Resources website.]

Quantitative data can be analyzed by calculating frequencies, percentages, and simple descriptive statistics, such as means and standard deviations. For multiple choice items, you can calculate frequencies and percentages. (For multiple choice items that allow only one response, you must use the COUNTIF function to sort through the responses because the column will contain multiple numerical codes.) You may also want to calculate measures of central tendency (AVERAGE and MEDIAN functions) and standard deviations (STDEV function). Additional statistical functions and tutorials can be found through the Excel Help feature.

Qualitative data can be analyzed by the identification of themes. First, copy and paste the column of responses for that item into a new sheet of the Excel file. Next, scan through the responses and note some themes (or patterns) you see across multiple responses. Put a label for each theme in its own column across the top of the spreadsheet. Now, read through each response again, and enter a "1" in that row under the theme(s) to which it applies. As you go through the process, you may need to add new themes or modify existing. By adding the number of "1"s in each column using the SUM function, you can get a sense of which themes were most common.

Questions about evaluation? Visit the Extension Evaluation Resources website or contact Amy Hilgendorf (aehilgen@k-state.edu) or Mandi Peters (mpeters8@ksu.edu, 785-532-0648) at OEIE.

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Professional Skills for Program Evaluation

Research as defined by the British Library is "searching carefully, with a method, so that you can answer a question. It is wider than finding out a fact and more focused than reading widely around a subject." Program evaluation is research. In this installment, we discuss professional skills that can assist you in your evaluation efforts.

Q: What professional skills will help me evaluate my programs?

Some skills routinely described as "research skills" are really about problem-solving, critical and conceptual thinking, reflection, and communication skills. You need not be an expert in evaluation methods and analysis to utilize skills you already have to carry out effective and meaningful evaluations of your programs.

In the field of evaluation, skills are needed for evaluation design, data collection strategies, and data analysis and interpretation. Below we elaborate on these three skill sets and discuss how these skills correspond to those KSRE professionals already possess.

Evaluation design: Use your critical and conceptual thinking skills to determine the evaluation question(s) of interest. What are the goals of your program and what types of information could indicate whether these goals are being met? What are the needs of the audience(s) for your programs and evaluation results?

Data collection strategies: Use your problem-solving skills to determine how best to gather data about those goals yet do not exceed your available resources. Then once you have determined how to collect

this data, use your written and oral communication skills to gather this data from your participants through questionnaires, interviews, or some other approach.

Data analysis and interpretation: This skill set may be the most intimidating if you do not have a formal education in statistics or other types of data analysis. However, at its most basic form, analysis involves pattern recognition and looking for similarities and differences. Use your problem-solving and reflection skills to look for these similarities, differences, and patterns. Then, rely on your communications skills to present your findings in a meaningful, accessible way to your stakeholders in written summaries, presentations, or conversations.

In addition to skills, established principles for conducting evaluation activities may also be helpful to you. We at OEIE adhere to the American Evaluation Association's Guiding Principles for Evaluators for preparing and conducting evaluation activities. These guidelines – Systematic Inquiry, Competence, Integrity/Honesty, Respect for People, and Responsibilities for General and Public Welfare - describe attitudes and dispositions that will aid your evaluation efforts and suggest basic parameters for conducting effective and meaningful evaluations. Use the link above to find out more.

You can find online resources to help you further build your evaluation skills on the Additional Resources page of the Extension Evaluation Resources website. Networking and partnering with other organizations and KSRE professionals is another great way to improve your skills. And remember, we are a resource for you in any stage of your evaluation.

Questions about evaluation? Visit the Extension Evaluation Resources website or contact Amy Hilgendorf (aehilgen@ksu.edu, 785-532-5538) or Mandi Peters (mpeters8@ksu.edu, 785-532-0648) at OEIE.

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12/11/2012

Evaluating Websites and Electronic Media

Extension professionals reach their target audiences through various forms of communication, including websites and other electronic media. In this installment, we will discuss how to evaluate the impact of such media on participants. This information may be useful for any evaluation effort using technology, such as email newsletters, websites, social media, or other online educational materials.

Q: How can I evaluate the impact of a website or electronic media?

Just like evaluating any program component, the impact of websites and electronic media, like e-newsletters and social media communiation, can be measured using both quantitative and qualitative measures.

Quantitative measures can be utilized to assess the use and the engagement of participants with the media. For example, one way to assess the use of a website is to count the number of views a specific post has received. To do this you can integrate counting or tracking mechanisms into the website. Google Analytics (www.google.com/analytics/) presents one solution, generating statistics on website traffic.

In order to assess participants' engagement with website content, you can conduct counts of discussions and sharing of the information. Such discussions and sharing are often referred to as *influence*. Examples of this type of influence are "liked" posts on Facebook or "re-tweets" through Twitter. Thus, you can assess the engagement of participants with electronic media with frequency counts of comments, questions, likes, re-posts, and sharing. Tools that measure participants' engagement or influence on social networking sites include Klout (klout.com) and for Twitter, Twitalyzer (twitalyzer.com).

To obtain a more complete picture of the impact of electronic media on participants, qualitative data can be collected from those using the website, receiving an e-newsletter, or accessing materials. You can obtain this qualitative data through interviews, focus groups, or open-ended survey questions. To obtain a breadth of perceptions, participants who use the media to varying extents (e.g., daily users to one-time visitors) should be included. Focus group, interview, and survey questions should be designed with your overarching evaluation questions in mind. Examples of such questions may be:

- How many people are we reaching through the website?
- To what extent are people people using the available resources?
- How did website traffic change after the addition of new content or a redesign?
- How engaged are people with the content?

To answer questions like these, focus groups, interviews, and open-ended surveys can gather information about, for example: the website or electronic newsletter components used most and least frequently, the amount of time spent engaging with the social media, how engaged participants felt with the material, and how participants felt components facilitated or inhibited their engagement.

If you have any questions or feedback about evaluating the impact of websites and electronic media, we would love to hear it! As always, we hope to refine Extension evaluation tools so they best meet your needs, and your input is a very valuable component in this process.

Questions about evaluation? Visit the Extension Evaluation Resources website or contact Amy Hilgendorf (aehilgen@k-state.edu, 785-532-5538) or Mandi Peters (mpeters8@ksu.edu, 785-532-0648) at OEIE.

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11/13/2012

Evaluation with Low-Literacy Audiences

Extension professionals serve a wide variety of audiences, including some marginalized and vulnerable audiences. Programs may be difficult to evaluate if working with low-literacy audiences and children since standard approaches, such as written surveys, cannot easily be used with participants who have low reading or writing skills.

Q: How can I design an evaluation for participants with low-literacy abilities?

The participants' needs must always come first. Participants may feel the stress of the education process (even though your program is not "school"); that stress increases when literacy is an issue. Four evaluation strategies are useful when working with low-literacy audiences: interviews, oral surveys, visuals, and adapting existing written evaluation instruments.

Interviews: A common strategy when working with low-literacy audiences is to conduct interviews with participants. This approach allows the interviewer to ask for clarity and to probe for additional information. While this approach may provide a large amount of informative data, it can be labor-intensive and potentially unreliable if the questions are sensitive and participants do not feel comfortable responding face-to-face. Interviews can also lead to bias if interviewers ask questions inconsistently or in a leading way.

Oral Surveys: In this approach, a blank answer sheet and pencil are given to each program participant. The answer sheet include the number for each survey question followed by two columns, one marked "Yes" and the other marked "No." Survey questions are read aloud, in order, and participants are instructed to mark one of the two columns. Depending on the audience level, multiple choice and open-ended responses may be included on the answer sheet.

Visuals: The use of realistic, colored images are effective in eliciting feedback from low-literacy audiences. For example, children can point to "happy" or "sad" faces to provide feedback about a program. Low-literacy adults may select from a group of pictures to provide an example of the types of foods they would eat for a nutritious meal. Demographic data could be collected by asking each participant to select pictures from a set that best represents him or her.

Adapt existing written evaluation instruments: Modify existing written evaluation tools by limiting the total number of words and using words with less than three syllables. Two popular readability formulas for English text consider vocabulary, word complexity, sentence length, and writing style: Flesch-Kincaid Reading and Flesch Reading Ease. You can assess the readability of the instrument in Microsoft Word and adjust as needed for the audience. Visuals and layout can also improve readability.

When participating in an evaluation, low-literacy audiences should feel confident that they can understand the questions and provide their feedback. Evaluation tools can capitalize on verbal abilities or feature visuals and wording that facilitate understanding and participation. This kind of user-friendly evaluation tool gathers valuable evaluation data and helps promote trust with low-literacy audiences by minimizing frustration with the evaluation process.

Questions about evaluation? Visit the Extension Evaluation Resources website or contact Amy Hilgendorf (aehilgen@k-state.edu, 785-532-5538) or Mandi Peters (mpeters8@ksu.edu, 785-532-0648) at OEIE.

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Gliem, R., Lackman, L., & Nieto, R.D. (1997). Instrument development for low literacy audiences: Assessing extension program personnel teaching effectiveness. *Journal of Extension, 35*(1). U.S. Cooperative Extension System. http://www.joe.org/joe/1997february/rb1.php

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9/11/2012

Evaluating One-Time and Informal Education Programs

When education programs are brief or presented informally, it can be especially challenging to determine what data to collect and outcomes to measure in an evaluation. Several innovative methods for collecting data for one-time and informal program evaluation are highlighted in this installment, as well as important limitations to consider.

Q: What strategies can be used to evaluate one-time or informal education events, such as educational exhibits at county fairs, health fairs, and community festivals?

Measuring program outcomes for exhibits, health fairs, festivals, and other single instance events can be challenging when the target population is available for only a short window of time. Methods of collecting evaluation data from participants in these events can take many forms. For example:

- Reviews of *archival data* can use guest books or gift shop purchases to determine where participants live and if target audiences are being reached.

- An interview technique called *naïve notions* can be used to identify participants' initial perceptions of exhibits prior to the experience and to evaluate their understanding of the exhibit.
- *Post-it surveys* obtain feedback from participants via responses on sticky notes to displayed evaluation questions.
- The *talk aloud* is an interactive interview method used to gather feedback and observe reactions from participants. This allows the evaluator the ability to prompt discussion to collect data on project goals.
- *Tracking and timing* with the aid of a simple observation form can be used to measure movements and actions, and serve as evidence of participant engagement in a booth or exhibit.

For informal education programs that involve youth, *kiddie focus groups* can be used to obtain feedback directly from the youth. By adapting a typical focus group procedure to make questions simpler and to clearly explain the purpose and intent of the evaluation, younger audiences can provide feedback on, for example, the development of positive relationships, safety and belonging, exploration and skill building, and meaningful involvement.

When evaluating one-time and informal education programs, there are a few considerations to keep in mind:

1. **Set realistic expectations**: One-time and informal education programs are often short. For example, the maximum time spent at educational exhibits is approximately 20 minutes. It is not realistic to expect significant learning outcomes from this short of exposure. Instead, focus on small aspects that lead toward larger impact when documenting evidence of outcomes.
2. **Use nontraditional assessments to match participants' intentions**: The public often uses exhibits and informal education opportunities for leisurely experiences, not to be tested. Brief, non-intimidating, and open-ended assessments are likely to be the most valid.
3. **Prepare participants:** Give participants a heads up that you will be asking them some questions about the program or exhibit. With this preparation, participants can offer more valuable and thoughtful responses.

Overall, when developing methods of data collection for one-time events and informal education programs, be flexible and responsive to the situation and to participants.

References and for further information:

Christensen, L., Nielsen, J. E., Rogers, C. M., & Volkov, B. (2005). Creative data collection in nonformal settings. *New Directions for Evaluation*, 73–79.

Friedman, A. (Ed.). (2008). *Framework for evaluating impacts of informal science education projects.* Available at http://caise.insci.org/uploads/docs/Eval_Framework.pdf

Questions about evaluation? Visit the Extension Evaluation Resources website or contact Amy Hilgendorf (aehilgen@k-state.edu, 785-532-5538) or Mandi Peters (mpeters8@ksu.edu, 785-532-1651) at OEIE.

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8/14/2012

When to Evaluate

Program evaluation is a process, not a singular event. In fact, it can take place at many points throughout the programming cycle (and, if you have the resources, it should). In this installment, we discuss when and why program evaluation may be most valuable to you.

Q: When should you conduct a program evaluation?

Before you can conduct a program evaluation you must first determine what kind of information you are looking for. For example, if you are interested in identifying the most common and urgent needs of your constituents, you may want to conduct a *needs assessment*. A *formative program evaluation* may be conducted if you are interested in understanding the process of the program and how that process may be enhanced or managed more effectively and efficiently. Finally, a *summative evaluation* approach may be used in assessments of a program's merit or worth after the program has been completed.

In order to gain additional insight into what and how to evaluate your program, try returning to the logic model. If you are interested in conducting a formative evaluation, for example, may want to focus the evaluation on the *inputs* and *outputs* of the model and seek to answer questions such as "What do participants gain from the program?" and "To what extent have we reached the initiative goals?" But if you are interested in conducting a summative evaluation, including outcome and impact evaluation, you may look to the *outcomes* of the logic model to develop questions regarding the program's impact on the participants' knowledge and/or behavior.

Additionally, before conducting a program evaluation you will also need to take the program's duration into consideration. For programs consisting of four or more sessions and that take place over an extended period of time, a pre-/post-program evaluation may be an especially valuable approach. While the pre-program evaluation takes time from the beginning of the program, it provides information to compare to the information you gather at the end, showing the impact the program had on the participants.

However, for situations in which a program takes place over only one or a few sessions (or within only a couple of days or weeks), we suggest the use of a quick hand-raising activity to gather pre-program information or that you conduct only a post-program evaluation. These are great options for one-time and drop-in type programs, and can be used whenever you have concerns about time, energy (yours or participants'), or resources to do both a pre- and post-program evaluation. For such programs, you may also consider the use of a post-then-pre retrospective survey. Because the questions in this type of

survey ask program participants to reflect back and compare their knowledge after the program to before, you do not need to do any pre-program survey.

Following up with your participants three-to-six months after the program is especially valuable for gathering information about changes in participant behaviors. We strongly recommend you plan follow-up evaluation activities for programs that you expect will have a strong impact on participants, such as those that are more in-depth or take place over longer periods of time. We recommend different approaches for collecting this data depending on your audience. For example, an after program feedback form may be developed and given to a teacher or staff member to gain information about the behaviors of children after a program. For teen and adult audiences, you may administer a phone interview, brief paper or online survey. Your audience and the type of contact information you have for participants will influence the approach you take. To make a follow-up evaluation more practical, often you may sample a portion of your total participants.

Questions about evaluation? Visit the Extension Evaluation Resources website or contact Amy Hilgendorf (aehilgen@k-state.edu, 785-532-5538) or Mandi Peters (mpeters8@ksu.edu, 785-532-1651) at OEIE.

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7/17/2012

Logic Models and Program Evaluation

Logic models and program evaluation are two frequent topics in Extension circles, though often not at the same time. However, logic models and program evaluation are closely related and can be synergistic when considered together. In this installment, we examine the connections between logic models and program evaluation.

Q: How are logic models and program evaluation related?

While a logic model can involve various terms and various graphic depictions, one aspect is central: a logic model describes a sequence of change through logically-linked elements. For an educational program like those in Extension, a logic model describes how the program moves from "what is" (the current situation) to "what will be" (desired outcomes or impacts). Logic models are useful in program planning, implementation, communication, as well as evaluation. Though the terms may vary, logic models typically include:

- Broad intent of the program, the context, and the situation and priorities the program seeks to address
- Inputs – Resources, contributions, investments that go into the program, including staff and time

- Outputs – Activities, services, products that reach target audiences and encourage participation
- Outputs – Activities, services, and products that reach target audiences and create program engagement
- External influences – Assumptions and environmental factors that interact with the program

So, how does evaluation fit in? While the logic model describes the program, evaluation helps you determine how a program actually works. On the one hand, the logic model can help you determine what to evaluate, appropriate questions for evaluation, indicators or evidence to look for, when to collect data, and what methods to use to collect data. A strong logic model can also help ensure a well-planned and implemented program – a program you would want to evaluate and demonstrate its impacts. Evaluation - by determining what works, under what conditions, and why - can inform the logic model to identify needed or desired modifications, and thus, improve the program.

Evaluation can take place at points throughout the logic model. If you are interested in process or formative evaluation, you may focus your evaluation on the *inputs* and *outputs* of the model and seek to answer such questions as "Were the staff and funds adequate for the program," "Has the program successfully reached targeted audiences?" or "Has the program been implemented as planned?" If you are interested in summative evaluation, including outcome and impact evaluation, you may look to the *outcomes* of the logic model to develop evaluation questions like "What knowledge did participants gain from participating in the program?" and "Did participants change targeted behaviors after participation in the program?"

After an evaluation, the results you find can feed back into the logic model and improve the design and implementation of your program. For example, if you learned from a process evaluation that your program successfully reached children but not their parents, another key targeted audience, you may revise your marketing activities in the next version of the logic model. Or, if you learned from an outcome evaluation that participants did not retain some important information from the program, you may decide to revise your logic model to change the format or time spent in educational activities related to this content.

Want more information on logic models? The University of Wisconsin-Extension provides a number of resources about logic models for cooperative extension employees on their website.

Questions about evaluation? Visit the Extension Evaluation Resources website or contact Amy Hilgendorf (aehilgen@k-state.edu, 785-532-5538) or Mandi Peters (mpeters8@ksu.edu, 785-532-1651) at OEIE.

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6/12/2012

Connecting the Dots between Program Planning and Evaluation

In Extension sometimes we hear about the importance of program evaluation for program planning and overall program development. However, often it is not clear how program evaluation relates to this process. In this installment, we will discuss when and how program evaluation connects to the program planning process.

Q: How are program planning and program evaluation related?

Sometimes we think of both program planning and program evaluation as "must dos" – we do them because someone says we should. However, both activities are essential components of the program development process and help to achieve program improvement. Program evaluation is valuable at a number of times in this process and for different purposes.

A form of evaluation called a *needs assessment* can help kick off program planning by identifying the programmatic needs of your audience. Through a survey, document review, focus groups, or interviews with members of your target audience or other key informants, you can learn the most common and/or most urgent needs of your constituents. The KSRE *Program Prioritization* process includes a needs assessment approach that solicits information from the public and analyzes this information for priorities in each of the program areas.

As programs are being developed or implemented, a *formative evaluation* can gather information as they proceed for purposes of improvement or increasing program understanding among implementers. For example, a brief demographic survey that participants complete when they register for the program can help the program implementer determine if the target audience has been reached and, if not, what adjustments could be made right away to capture that audience. Observational evaluation methods, such as those conducted with the aid of a checklist or simply by noting participant behaviors, can also help program implementers determine the level of participant learning and consider the need for mid-course corrections. A formative evaluation focuses on understanding the process of the program and often looks to how that process may be improved.

The form of program evaluation we typically think of as "evaluation," is sometimes called a *summative evaluation* because the data gathered and analyzed is often about the end of the program. A summative evaluation can seek to identify the *impacts* or *outcomes* attributable to the program. In Extension, we often administer surveys to participants to discover the new learning, awareness, or attitudes participants gained through the program. After their initial participation, we may also follow up with participants with a brief phone call or other method to determine the impact of their learning on their behaviors. We may also evaluate the impacts and outcomes of a program through other sources of data, such as records of crop yields or new business start-ups in a community.

Ultimately, program evaluation may be used to inform a new cycle of program planning. By comparing the achieved outcomes to the desired outcomes in a summative evaluation, we can inform our planning and decide if the program requires adjustments. Coupled with the results of a formative evaluation, we may also recognize the processes of the program that facilitate or frustrate outcome achievement, and may be built upon or minimized or removed. The positive results of a program evaluation may also be disseminated to important stakeholders to secure new or additional funding for a program, and thereby, benefit future programming.

Questions about evaluation? Contact Amy Hilgendorf (aehilgen@k-state.edu, 785-532-5538) or Mandi Peters (mpeters8@ksu.edu, 785-532-1651) at OEIE.

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4/24/2012

The Evaluation Reporting System

At the 2012 Spring Action Conference this month, we demoed the progress in the development of the online K-State Research and Extension Evaluation Reporting System. For those of you who were not there or would like additional information, in this segment, we discuss the goals and focus of the system and the development process.

Q: What is the new KSRE Evaluation Reporting System?

The overarching purpose of this system is to collect evaluation information about all Extension programs across the state via one online system used by every KSRE professional. The goals of the system are three-fold:

1. **Central repository** for program evaluation data. The system will be the one place you'll need to enter your program or program series data, contacts and their demographics, and the data collected through your evaluation instruments.
2. **Up-to-date and useful data** for reporting impact and program planning. The system will compile entered data so you can view the data at any time for any date range and across your county, district, or state; programs; and sessions. It will provide you with some basic tools, like charts and graphs, that allow you to analyze and begin to make sense of the data easily.
3. **User-friendly interface** that provides an intuitive and non-threatening experience. Aspects of the system include homepage access to activities you will use most often; ability to save progress at any time; access to compiled data in the manner you need it, e.g., by custom date ranges, by location, or by program; and support features you can access at any time, such as video tutorials and FAQs.

Development of the system began in the winter and will culminate October 1, 2012, in time to be used for the new programming year. To date, we have developed the foundational structures to store program series and evaluation impact data, and to provide access to data that will meet county, state and federal reporting needs. Our next round of development will be to incorporate the feedback individuals and PFTs provided at the Spring Action Conference regarding the collection and reporting aspects that the system needs to provide. The third round of development, piloting or user-testing the system with KSRE professionals, will begin late this summer.

Please note that the system that will be launched October 1st will not replace the Action Plan Reporting System. You will still need to upload your 2012-13 program year action plans and evaluation instruments to that system, but you will only need to enter the impact data you collect during that program year into the Evaluation Reporting System. Also, for the 2012-13 program year, this system will only include the PFT Action Plan Evaluation Instruments. We will expand the system to include all evaluation instruments used by KSRE professionals and across program areas after the initial launch.

We appreciate the honest and direct feedback we received at the Spring Action Conference and we look forward to receiving more of your insights and needs of the system. Your continued participation in the development of this system, including the pilot testing, is integral to creating a system that provides all of the necessary aspects that you need for collecting data and reporting impact in a manner that is useable, useful and efficient.

As you conduct your evaluations over the next several months, please keep this system in mind and contact us with any ideas for the Evaluation Reporting System. If you are interested in participating in the pilot and have not yet submitted your name, please contact us as well.

Questions about evaluation or suggestions for the reporting system? Contact Amy Hilgendorf (aehilgen@k-state.edu, 785-532-5538) or Mandi Peters (mpeters8@ksu.edu, 785-532-3423) at OEIE.

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3/20/2012

Collecting Follow-Up Impact Data

To gain robust information on the impact of your programs, it is very valuable to collect follow-up data from participants several weeks or months after their initial participation. Collecting follow-up data can help you determine how the knowledge, skills and attitudes participants gained may have led to behavioral changes and other impacts – and to convey these impacts convincingly to stakeholders. In this installment, we discuss features common to several follow-up data collection approaches.

Q: What should I consider when collecting follow-up data from participants three to six months after the program?

When we evaluate our programs, we often conduct our evaluation at the conclusion of the program, typically, with an end-of-program survey. While these immediate activities can provide valuable information about short-term impacts of your program, such as knowledge or new attitudes participants gained, you may increase the value of your evaluation significantly by continuing your efforts a few months after the program. By collecting follow-up data from your participants, you may learn how participants *applied* new knowledge, skills, or attitudes to make *behavioral changes* later on.

When you decide to collect follow-up evaluation data there are typically a few things you want to achieve: 1) to gain information about the continued impacts of the program, especially participant behavioral changes; 2) to align data gathered from participants in the short-term with the medium-term; and 3) to get more in-depth stories of impacts for individual participants. With these goals in mind, follow-up evaluations, whether a survey, interview, observation or other approach, will often have the following features:

- Elements that illuminate behavioral changes in participants. In an interview or survey, this may be a question like, "Have you done anything different because of your participation in this program?" In an observation, for example, of children's eating in a lunch room or of gardeners' work in a community garden, an observation checklist will guide you to look for evidence of new behaviors.
- Aspects that clearly connect short-term to medium-term data to illustrate how the short-term impacts associate with medium-term impacts. With a follow-up survey or interview, you can ask questions that build directly from the short-term data. For example, if Participant #325 reported in the initial survey that he learned "important information for the successful management of my operation," then in a follow-up phone interview you may want to ask, "How have you applied information from the program to the management of your operation?"
- Items that gather more in-depth information about specific impacts for individual participants. Open-ended questions in an interview or survey, like those shown above, can elicit detailed accounts from participants that go far beyond "Yes" and "No" or "Agree" and "Disagree" (including "success stories").

Whatever approach you take, doing additional evaluation work months after your program is complete can feel burdensome. However, with a few simple actions you can make this valuable next step more manageable. Plan and develop your follow-up evaluation materials when you develop your initial evaluation materials. By developing these consecutively, you will ensure that your priorities for the entire program evaluation remain consistent and complementary. By seeking email addresses in the contact information you gather from participants can allow for the possibility of conducting an online survey later on. You can also limit a follow-up survey or phone interview to a few key questions to make it easier for you to conduct and for participants to complete. Sampling a portion of your participant group for interviews, observations, or surveys can also make follow-up evaluations much more practical.

Questions about evaluation? Contact Amy Hilgendorf (aehilgen@k-state.edu, 785-532-5538) or Mandi Peters (mpeters8@ksu.edu, 785-532-3423) at OEIE.

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2/14/2012

The Basics of Focus Groups

Focus group interviews are yet another data collection method you can employ to gather information regarding program impact, to inform program improvements, or to assess program needs. As with all data collection methods, there are advantages and disadvantages to focus groups. In this installment, we briefly explore focus groups and when you should consider conducting them.

Q: What are focus groups and how can I use them to evaluate program impacts?

Conducting focus groups is an efficient method to affirm the value of your program, to identify improvements for the continuation of a program, and/or to identify needs for programming. This method allows you to gather a significant amount of qualitative data in a relatively short amount of time. One of the major benefits of focus groups is the dialogue; participants connect with each other and relate information that they may not have even touched on if they were asked a similar question in a survey or an interview. Their conversations can bring crisper details to their success stories and provide context and specific factors contributing to issues or needs that could be addressed in the program. If you have the feeling that the impact information you have gathered from participants is only the beginning of what they have to say, you may want to consider focus groups.

A *focus group* is often envisioned as a 90-minute facilitated discussion of six to fifteen participants. The majority of focus groups are of this formal variety. Another option, however, is an informal focus group. If you have fifteen minutes at the end of your program session, you can facilitate a discussion on a specific question. An example of a question is, "What is the one thing you learned today that you feel will have the most lasting effect on you?" As the participants discuss this question, you can record their testimonials and use them to enhance the quantitative data in your impact report.

When beginning to consider a focus group, keep your purpose in mind – Are you looking for qualitative or quantitative data? Is the topic so sensitive that people may not feel comfortable discussing it in a group? Does the topic require confidentiality? Focus groups do not provide you with hard numbers and percentages. In your impact report, you can note approximate frequency using data from focus groups, for example, *"majority*" or *"about one-half of participants."* However, if your purpose is to gain the hard numbers, quantitative data, a survey is more appropriate. Or, if your topic is extremely sensitive or requires confidentiality, individual interviews, or in some cases a survey, would be more appropriate.

One practical consideration of focus groups is personnel resources. To conduct a formal focus group you will need at least two people, a moderator and an assistant moderator/documenter. The other roles incorporated into this method, such as the analyzer and writer, can be carried out by these two people. One resolution to this possible constraint is to involve neighboring county KSRE professionals who have experience in conducting or are interested in learning more about focus groups. In this way, their contribution to your focus group can be an opportunity to collaborate and mentor throughout KSRE.

Want more information on focus groups? Visit the Extension Evaluation Resources website (http://apps.oeie.ksu.edu/extension/index.php). We recently presented on this topic at the FCS Update and have posted our PowerPoint presentation, along with a summary of the questions and answers that came up during this session. Or contact Amy Hilgendorf at OEIE (aehilgen@k-state.edu, 785-532-5538).

Resource for focus groups:

Krueger, R.A., & Casey, M.A. (2000). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research (3rd ed.).* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc.

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1/17/2012

Individual or Group Level Data

Program evaluations can gather and utilize data collected from individuals or groups. Determining whether to collect individual-level or group-level data is a decision that should be made early in the evaluation process, as this decision impacts the format of the evaluation instruments and the conclusions you will be able to draw. In this installment, we discuss why and how you may choose to focus on individuals and/or groups in your evaluation.

Q: Should I collect data from individuals or from groups in my evaluation?

In social research, the "*unit*" (or *"element"*) describes the particular entity of focus in a study. The unit of interest could be *individuals, groups, artifacts* (e.g., books, photos), *geographical units* (e.g., towns, census tracts), or *social interactions* (e.g., meetings, divorces). Most frequently studies will refer to the "unit of analysis" because typically the analysis you do in your study decides what the unit will be. However, it is important to think about the unit (or units) of interest early in an evaluation project, especially when you design the evaluation and develop your instruments.

If you are interested in knowing about *individuals* and how they experienced or benefited from a program, then it is important to make sure that your evaluation design and instruments allow you to gather and analyze data at the individual-level. Collecting data from individual participants may be especially valuable if you want to track individual change between a pre- and post- program survey. Individual data permits a wide variety of statistical analyses. Plus, you maintain the ability to collapse

individual data into various groupings, such as a "session," or along demographic variables, like age or level of education. In this way, you can have different units of analysis within one design. However, collecting, managing, and entering data for individual participants can often be time-consuming and, therefore, require more resources.

Typical methods for collecting individual-level data are surveys and individual interviews. With such methods you will collect data specific to an individual; for example, the individual's unique responses to questions about what they learned from participating in your program. To ensure that data stays connected to individuals, a unique ID of numbers and/or letters is typically assigned to individuals and connected to the data to be entered into a dataset like in Microsoft Excel. (The unique ID also helps preserve the confidentiality of your program participants.) If you want to track the responses of the same individuals between a pre- and post-program survey, it is important to make sure these IDs are exactly matched to individuals both pre- and post-program.

If you are more interested in gathering data for *groups* or have concerns about the time and resources available for evaluation, you may choose a different approach. When you collect group-level data, for example, by noting your observations of the group in a session, you can get a sense of how groups overall experience or benefit from your program. Such an approach can gather useful data about your program and be more practical with regard to time and resources. However, without individual-level data you lose the opportunity to examine how individuals changed between pre- and post-program surveys (e.g., individual change in knowledge or skills), how individual factors may associate with program impacts (e.g., previous experience with the topic), as well as the ability to regroup individuals according to new groupings of interest (e.g., those who adopted best practices versus those who didn't).

Group-level data can be collected through observations, focus group interviews, or survey methods that pool together responses, such as using "clicker" technology to poll participants. Because you are not attending to each piece of individual-level data, collecting, managing, and entering group-level data collected from these methods can be easier and more efficient. However, analysis and interpretation of the data will always be at the group-level and cannot move back to the individual-level.

Questions about evaluation? Visit the Extension Evaluation Resources website (http://apps.oeie.ksu.edu/extension/index.php) or contact Amy Hilgendorf at OEIE (aehilgen@k-state.edu, 785-532-5538).

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12/20/2011

Comparing Survey Designs

Asking participants to participate in a survey and complete a questionnaire is a common strategy for evaluating the impact of extension programs. There are different designs you may consider for a survey,

each with its own set of advantages and disadvantages. In this installment of *Ask the OEIE Evaluator,* we will discuss three survey designs.

Q: Should I conduct a pre- and post-test? Just a post-test? A retrospective post-then-pre? How do I decide?

These three survey designs –*pre-test post-test, post-test only*, and *retrospective post-then-pre* – differ in the timing in which participants complete the survey and in the kinds of information sought at that time. Accordingly, each design presents particular advantages and disadvantages.

With a *pre-test post-test* design, participants are asked to complete a questionnaire at the beginning of a program and then again at the end. These questionnaires typically include some or all of the same question items so that you can compare responses after their participation in the program to their response prior to participation. The main advantage of a pre-test post-test is that you may infer the effect of your program on changes in reported attitudes, knowledge, and perhaps behaviors, based on participants' responses "pre" to "post." However, one significant disadvantage of this design is the possibility of participants remembering or learning from the pre-test, especially if the time between the pre- and the post- is relatively short, and thus responding to the post-test based on that and not what they gained from the program. And, sometimes participants can actually learn from the program that they did not know as much about a topic before as they thought they did, and thus respond lower in the post-test than the pre-test! This is called a *"response shift bias."*

When there are concerns about the time, energy (yours or participants'), and resources needed to do both a pre-test and post-test, you may sometimes choose a *post-test only* design. While this may be easier to implement, the post-test design only allows you to assess participants' reported knowledge, attitudes or behaviors *after* the program. This makes it difficult to consider how this may compare to before participation, and thereby, determine the actual effect of your program. Sometimes you can gain a sense of the program effect if you can also gather information from non-participants or identify comparable information (e.g., results from a published study).

Much like the post-test only design, the *post-then-pre retrospective* survey design is both time and cost effective. It is administered at the end of the program and contains questions about the participant's knowledge and behavior after, but also *before,* having participated in it. By asking participants to reflect back on their knowledge and behavior before the program and to compare that to after the program, the post-then-pre retrospective design can be similar to the pre-test post-test design in that it can allow for inference of the effect of their program on changes in knowledge, attitudes, and/or behavior. This design can also help control response shift bias. However, the post-then-pre retrospective is not without its own limitations. For example, participants (especially children) may not always be able to accurately recall the requested information. Additionally, participants may report a change even if one did not occur simply because they know they were supposed to change. This is one form of *self-report bias* that can occur with the use of the post-then-pre retrospective design.

Questions about evaluation? Visit the Extension Evaluation Resources website (http://apps.oeie.ksu.edu/extension/index.php) or contact Amy Hilgendorf at OEIE (aehilgen@k-state.edu, 785-532-5538).

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11/29/2011

The Basics of Sampling

The time and resources required to conduct program evaluations are common concerns for K-State Research and Extension professionals. For an evaluation to be worthwhile, it must be practical for those who conduct evaluations and those who respond to them. Furthermore, if an evaluation is burdensome, the information gathered is often compromised. Devising a thoughtful sampling strategy is one way to ensure that an evaluation is practical and achievable.

Q: Why and how should I sample for my program evaluation?

Sampling is the process of selecting units (i.e., individuals or groups of participants) from a population of interest. In other words, sampling involves *selecting a subset of participants* from whom you will seek information, and when or how often you will seek this information from them, rather than including all participants at all times. Depending on the size of your audience, a selection of just 10-20% of participants could be a valuable sample size.

Probability sampling is an approach in which all participants have a chance of being selected through some form of *random selection.* You could ask participants to complete a questionnaire in every 3rd or 5th workshop conducted, as an example of *systematic random sampling*. As an example of a *simple random sample*, you could draw names to select participants for a follow-up interview. You could combine approaches for a *stratified random sampling* by dividing participants into particular groups of interest and then random sampling from those groups. When random sampling is used, you can generally assume that the feedback from your sample is representative of the larger group.

Depending on the intent of your program, you may be especially interested in evaluating the impact for a particular subset of the audience. ***Purposive sampling*** can be used if you want information from a specific group of participants. For example, if you are particularly interested in whether first-time participants benefit from your program, you could screen these individuals during registration and only seek their participation in your evaluation. However, it is important to keep in mind that when random sampling is not used, as with *purposive sampling*, results should be understood to apply just to the group that was targeted (e.g., first-time participants) and not representative of the larger group.

Remember, other decisions can help make your evaluation both practical and valuable. You should be clear about what you hope to learn from your evaluation and ensure that the questions you ask align with these intents. Additional questions may be interesting to ask but could make your evaluation more

burdensome without adding value. [See previous "Ask the OEIE Evaluator" segments] You should also determine what programs are most important to evaluate in relation to current priorities. Likewise, it is important to decide when the best time is to conduct your evaluations; it is often best to assess the knowledge gains of participants after the full program has ended.

Questions about evaluation? Visit the Extension Evaluation Resources website (http://apps.oeie.ksu.edu/extension/index.php) or contact Amy Hilgendorf at OEIE (aehilgen@k-state.edu, 785-532-5538).

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10/25/2011

Resources for Measuring to Reporting Program Impact

In this installment we will highlight some recent additions to the Extension Evaluation Resources website (http://apps.oeie.ksu.edu/extension/) that may be useful in your evaluation efforts. These resources include a PowerPoint originally developed for and shared at the K-State Research and Extension annual conference.

Q: What are some resources I can use for measuring program impacts?

The Extension Evaluation Resources website houses various resources to assist in your program evaluation efforts, and will offer more resources as the collective KSRE toolbox grows! Four new additions to the website offer particular value for measuring program impacts.

The "Tips and Tools for Measuring Program Impacts: From Delivering Programs to Reporting Impacts" PowerPoint presentation provides a general overview of the process for measuring impacts of KSRE programs. The PowerPoint highlights three key phases of the program evaluation cycle, from reviewing evaluation instruments to writing your final impact reports, and suggests important considerations during each phase.

"Reviewing Evaluation Instruments," aligns with the first phase. This simple rubric can help you review existing evaluation instruments and determine if it will meet your needs or if adjustments are needed. This rubric can help you consider the utility and feasibility of an evaluation instrument in its present state for your particular program, and based on your review, you can begin to identify adaptations you could make to better serve your evaluation needs.

"Analyzing Program Impacts: Data Analysis Plan," can assist you once you have collected some data and need to figure out what to do with it. This worksheet prompts you to revisit questions from your survey or interview protocol, determine what you hoped to learn from asking that question, and think about what type of data analysis is needed. For example, if you wanted to know if you were able to increase the knowledge of your participants about a certain topic, a frequency count or calculation of percentage

would be a useful analysis. The second page of the worksheet summarizes some of the basic analytical strategies that will provide you with the answers you and your stakeholders will want in most situations.

"Preparing to Write Impact Reports," can assist you after your data has been analyzed and you are ready to present your impacts. This worksheet prompts you to consider key findings from your analysis and to determine how you can write about them in a meaningful and valuable way for your audience. As you work with your results to present your program impacts, make sure to think about how the results fit together and tell a complete story about your program, including quantitative (statistical) and qualitative (testimonials and open-ended) results.

If you try out these tools and have some feedback for us, we would love to hear it! We would like to further refine these tools so they best meet your needs, and your input is valuable to that process.

Do you have questions about evaluation or resources to suggest for the website? Contact Amy Hilgendorf at OEIE (aehilgen@k-state.edu, 785-532-5538).

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9/27/2011

New Extension Evaluation Resources Website

In previous installments, we have discussed questions regarding evaluation activities. We switch gears a bit for this installment to look at the new Extension Evaluation Resources website (http://apps.oeie.ksu.edu/extension/). This website was developed by OEIE as a repository for evaluation information and helpful tools specially designed for K-State Research and Extension professionals. You can access this website using the URL above or via the link on the Program Development and Reporting page of the KSRE website.

Q: What kind of information is located on the Extension Evaluation Resources website?

The Extension Evaluation Resources website provides K-State Research and Extension professionals easy access to information and materials for a variety of evaluation efforts. The resources housed on this site were selected because they will assist you in preparing, implementing, and sharing program impact evaluations.

The homepage is the portal to the evaluation tools and information, including updates on OEIE evaluation capacity building events and other news related to extension evaluation. On every page you'll find links to the *Ask the OEIE Evaluator's* newest installment, as well as previous installments.

The Evaluation Resources and Templates page allows you to download templates and examples of evaluation tools used by you or your colleagues. Many of the worksheets and examples have been provided in our evaluation capacity building meetings and events over the last couple of years. This

listing of evaluation resources and templates will expand as Program Focus Teams revise or develop new evaluation instruments and as we progress in other evaluation efforts.

The K-State Research and Extension Links page provides you with a list of links that refer back to pages on the KSRE website so that you can quickly access the KSRE resources you need for your evaluation work. A few of the KSRE pages linked from this page are the Program Development and Reporting page, a direct link to the listing of 2011-2012 PFT action plans and evaluation instruments, and the Communications Services Marketing Unit page *Writing Effective Impact Statements*.

The Additional Resources page links you to evaluation resources gathered by university extension programs in other states, as well as linking to other valuable online resources. You will find links to the University of Kentucky, College of Agriculture's Program Development and Evaluation Resources, the *Journal of Extension,* and American Evaluation Association's Extension Education Evaluation topical interest group, among other sources.

Please know that the Evaluation Resources website is designed to grow and to adapt to your needs as we progress in KSRE evaluation capacity building. In the near future, we anticipate adding resources and information regarding analyzing data and reporting on impact.

Questions about evaluation or the new website? Contact Amy Hilgendorf at OEIE (aehilgen@k-state.edu, 785-532-5538).

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9/13/2011

Determining What Programs to Evaluate

Having written in this space about evaluation questions and about methods for collecting evaluation data, we turn now to another key question: How to decide *what* to evaluate? The work of an extension professional is multi-faceted and can often feel stretched, so it is not practical or even valuable to evaluate every aspect of extension programming. This fact requires you to make decisions about what extension programs to evaluate.

Q: *How do I determine what extension programs to evaluate?*

Whether we realize it or not, all programs are already being evaluated to some extent. Often extension professionals evaluate programs informally as they pay attention to casual feedback and their own observations. However, a more concerted effort towards program evaluation is valuable and/or necessary in other situations and requires a thoughtful process of identifying evaluation questions, collecting appropriate information, and analyzing and reporting the results. Since a formal evaluation cannot be done for each and every aspect of extension programs, it can be helpful to think through two types of considerations.

First, **consider the value and usefulness you expect from the information you gather**. Evaluation information can be valuable *when it is required,* as it often is for reporting purposes. If a program you deliver meets the specified outcomes of your Program Focus Team, it would be important to make sure you evaluate this program. If another program is funded by a special grant, grant funders frequently require reports that include evaluation information about specific programmatic impacts.

There are other situations in which program evaluation is valuable and useful. If you are delivering a *new program*, especially one you hope to deliver again, evaluating the program can help you refine the program and make it more effective. For similar reasons, you may have an established program, but you want to determine *how to improve it* or *how to adapt it* for a new setting or format. You may also choose to evaluate a program to *demonstrate its worth* to stakeholders.

Second, it is important to **balance consideration about the value and usefulness of evaluation with consideration about the feasibility of conducting one**. You should think about *costs of required resources,* including monetary costs and staff time for collecting and working with data. Some programs have evaluation instruments already developed that include instructions for collecting and processing the data. These steps can considerably reduce the resources required for evaluation, thereby, making the evaluation more practical.

You should also consider *the program format*. If your program consists of a one-time workshop, for example, it could be challenging to include a formal evaluation activity and the collected data may be of little value. If your program involves a series of sessions, it may be more resourceful to evaluate the program at particular time-points, like the beginning and the end, than after every session, or by involving a carefully selected participant sample rather than every participant.

Questions about evaluation? Contact Amy Hilgendorf at OEIE (aehilgen@k-state.edu, 785-532-5538).

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08/30/2011

Different Methods to Gather Data and to Evaluate Programs

In the last installment of "Ask the OEIE Evaluator," we talked about survey questions and how they can help you gain information from participants about their experiences of a program. Surveys are a common way to gather data about a program and to evaluate its impacts; however, there are many other methods you may apply. Many of you are now working on your individual action and professional development plans for the upcoming year, including plans to evaluate your programs. In this installment we will consider the variety of methods you may plan to use for program evaluation.

Q: *What are different methods to gather data and to evaluate a program?*

Surveys of participants – whether done through a paper-and-pencil questionnaire, online, or over the phone – use structured questions and are valuable for learning about participants' perceptions of a program and its impacts on them. However, surveys may not be valuable or feasible for all programs. Depending on the intended outcomes of your program, you may seek other forms of data to better evaluate your program's impacts.

Valuable information for evaluating your program may come from people (as in a survey), or from observations or visual sources, or from existing documents or records. Here are some possible methods for gathering program data:

- *Observation:* Information collected through seeing and listening, often with the aide of an observation protocol that can guide your attention. Observation may be done as a program is delivered, or afterward and in a location where the desired outcomes are expected to occur.
- *Interviews:* Information collected by talking with and listening to people, face-to-face or over the phone. Interviews can be highly structured, like in a survey, or more open-ended and conversational, depending on your evaluation purposes.
- *Focus groups or group assessment:* Gathering data and/or participant interpretations of data through focus group interviews or group processes like brainstorming, community forums, Delphi, or nominal group technique.
- *Document analysis:* The collection and careful analysis of existing documents relevant to the evaluation. These documents could be curriculum materials, minutes from board or community group meetings, newspaper articles, or public records, among others.
- *Diaries, journals, or logs:* Recording of events or observations over time. Participants, program presenters, or others can record information about a program briefly and factually, or note their personal perspectives as well.
- *Case study:* In-depth examination of a particular case (e.g., site/location, group of participants, program variation). Case studies use multiple sources of information and methods to provide as complete a picture as possible.

Deciding which method or methods to use in a program evaluation requires you to think about the intended outcomes of your program as well as practical considerations (i.e., the time, energy and resources you have for evaluation). In a future "Ask the OEIE Evaluator" installment, we will discuss how to decide what method of data collection is best for your evaluation.

Questions about evaluation? Contact Amy Hilgendorf at OEIE (aehilgen@k-state.edu, 785-532-5538).

Reference:

Program Development and Evaluation. (2002). *Methods for Collecting Information, Quick Tips #8.* University of Wisconsin-Extension: Madison.

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08/02/2011

What are Survey Questions?

In the last installment we talked about evaluation questions and how they fit in the evaluation process. In this installment we will talk about *survey questions* and when and where they come into play. It can be easy to sometimes confuse survey questions with evaluation questions because surveys are a frequently used approach to evaluating an educational program, perhaps especially in extension. Just think about the number of times you have been asked to complete a questionnaire at the end of a workshop, conference or course!

Q: *What are survey questions?*

When we think about "survey questions" we are usually thinking of the specific questions or items of a questionnaire. (The technical term for the set of questions is *questionnaire,* while *survey* technically refers to the process of obtaining responses from a group of respondents.) These are the questions that you ask *participants* to gain feedback about specific aspects of the program.

There are a variety of ways you may design the survey (e.g., an end-of-session survey, a pre-then-post survey, a post-then-pre reflective survey) and methods of delivery (e.g., by telephone, handout, electronic), and these variations may influence the questions you include. One particular authority on survey design for research and evaluation is Don Dillman, whose books OEIE refers to often (for one such resource see below).

Questionnaire items you write for a program evaluation will often:

- relate to the learning objectives for the program
- ask about change in knowledge, attitudes or behavior relative to your intended outcomes
- ask about ideas to improve the program
- gather information about participants' backgrounds
- seek contact information for a follow-up evaluation

For example, you may ask a closed-ended question like, "*After participating in this program, how confident do you feel in your ability to lead an effective meeting?"* and provide a scale for participants to select a rating from *"Not confident at all"* to *"Very confident."*

You could ask open-ended questions like, "*What is one thing you learned from this program that you did not know before participating?"* and ask participants to articulate their response in writing or verbally.

Keep in mind that there are various ways to collect evaluation data besides a survey, and depending on your purposes or the particulars of the program, you may choose another approach. Alternative methods of data collection include observations; accessing existing data, records or documentation; ability tests; and case studies. We will consider these other methods and when to use them in future installments of "Ask the OEIE Evaluator".

Questions about evaluation? Contact Amy Hilgendorf at OEIE (aehilgen@k-state.edu, 785-532-5538).

Resource for survey design:

Dillman, D. A., Smyth, J. D., & Christian L. M. (2009). *Internet, mail, and mixed mode surveys: The tailored design model.* Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

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07/19/2011

What are Evaluation Questions?

As Program Focus Teams work on their action plans for the *August 1st* deadline they are asked to provide evaluation questions that align with the desired short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes of the plan. Distinguishing between overarching evaluation questions and survey questions for evaluation tools can sometimes be challenging and overwhelming. Below we offer a brief explanation of evaluation questions.

Q: *What are evaluation questions?*

Evaluation questions guide the overall evaluation and help you to answer the big questions you have about your program or initiative. These are questions you ask of *yourself* as the evaluator. Evaluation questions drive the evaluation plan and point to the types of data to collect and how best to collect it.

Often evaluation questions ask whether we have achieved what we set out to achieve with the program, such as:

- *What do participants gain from the program?*
- *To what extent have we reached the initiative goals?*

However, you may have other big questions about your program or initiative, such as: *What activities seem to be most helpful to participants?* and, *Who are we reaching in our program? Are we reaching our target audience?*

Evaluation questions align with the desired short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes of our efforts and help us to determine whether we have actually achieved those outcomes. An example of an evaluation question to assess short-term, knowledge-based outcomes for a specific PFT action plan may be:

- *What knowledge did participants gain about issues facing older adults?* [For the Adult Development and Aging PFT]

In an individual's action plan, an agent or specialist would likely focus on only particular programs or pieces of a program focus area. For an individual action plan an evaluation question for medium-term, behavior-focused outcomes may be:

- *Three to six months after participating in a soil management program, what conservation tillage practices are participants using?* [For agriculture programs]

In our next installment we will talk about survey questions, their role and how to prepare them. Until then, if you have any questions related to evaluation questions or about the evaluation component of your action plans, please feel free to contact Amy Hilgendorf at OEIE (aehilgen@k-state.edu, 785-532-5538).

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