

## 2011-12 Successes

### **Title: Evaluation Capacity-Building in K-State Research and Extension *Office of Educational Innovation and Evaluation***

#### **Contact:**

Name: Amy Hilgendorf

Title: Evaluator

Address: 2323 Anderson Ave,  
Suite 220, Manhattan, KS 66502

Phone: 785-532-5538

E-mail: [ahilgen@ksu.edu](mailto:ahilgen@ksu.edu)

#### **The Situation**

In 2010, K-State Research and Extension (KSRE) contacted the Office of Educational Innovation and Evaluation (OEIE) to support evaluation capacity-building among KSRE professionals. It has become increasingly important for extension professionals to demonstrate understanding and competency in program evaluation so that extension professionals may specify the impacts of their work, communicate that value to various stakeholders, compete for grants and other resources, and use evaluation information to inform further program development (Stevenson, Florin, Mills, & Andrade, 2002). Evaluation of extension programs also often presents unique challenges, such as the quantification of impacts that cannot be easily quantified (Gruidl & Hustedde, 2003). However, extension professionals vary greatly in their past experience of program evaluation and often demonstrate different attitudes and practices of evaluation (Morford, Kozak, Suvedi, & Innes, 2006).

Evaluation capacity-building (ECB) seeks to enhance the ability of K-State Research and Extension and Program Focus Teams (PFTs) to plan, conduct, and use high quality evaluations. Through a variety of activities and support by OEIE, KSRE professionals develop evaluation skills that allow them to determine program impacts and to pursue program improvement through data-based decision-making.

#### **What We Did**

OEIE's ECB effort with KSRE involves two types of activity: 1) Professional development for all KSRE staff, and 2) Customized communication and assistance to PFT leaders. These efforts seek to develop extension-specific evaluation knowledge and abilities, and promote a culture of evaluation among all KSRE staff. ECB activities to date include:

- On-going consultation and assistance to PFTs on action plans and evaluation instruments
- Website of customized evaluation resources for KSRE (*Extension Evaluation Resources*, <http://apps.oeie.ksu.edu/extension/>)
- Presentation and meetings with PFTs at the 2011 K-State Research and Extension Annual Conference
- "Ask the OEIE Evaluator" series in the Tuesday Letter to respond to frequently asked questions about evaluation
- Additional evaluation support to KSRE professionals as requested

#### **Outcomes**

Through OEIE's meetings with all of the PFTs and analytical reviews and revisions of the annual action plans, 10 of the 11 PFTs have finalized a total of 19 action plans. These plans specify short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes to be achieved in the programming area. These action plans include evaluation questions that align with the outcomes and will help the team determine if they have actually met these outcomes.

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With additional assistance from OEIE several PFTs have:

- Created or refined practical and efficient evaluation instruments to measure the impact of their programs
- Streamlined processes for the collection and analysis of evaluation data
- Utilized evaluation data to craft compelling impact reports that communicate the benefits of their programs to various stakeholder audiences

As these evaluation materials are developed and refined, they become valuable examples of effective evaluation methods and are shared throughout the KSRE community, especially through the *Extension Evaluation Resources* website. As this body of resources grows, more and more KSRE professionals are putting them to use and OEIE receives additional requests for evaluation support. The increasing number of requests for evaluation assistance suggests that KSRE professionals are becoming accustomed to planning, developing, and implementing evaluation activities and that appreciation and value for evaluation efforts is growing in KSRE.

## Success Story

Through a process of ongoing communication, reviewing and offering feedback, OEIE assisted one PFT in developing a set of instruments for agents to assess short- and medium-term outcomes for their programs. The set of instruments consist of templates for a short-term survey and a medium-term protocol for phone interviews, and question banks to accompany each template. PFT members reviewed and informed the development of the evaluation instruments to ensure that the instruments were practical to use. KSRE agents are now using these instruments and collecting impact data to share back with the PFT.

The set represents a valuable and effective approach for balancing the dual needs for gathering standard information and providing flexibility for programs presented in different settings or in different ways. At the same time, the instruments are easy to use for both KSRE staff and program participants. OEIE has since shared the set of instruments with several other PFTs who are seeking an approach for addressing similar challenges.

In the process of refining the set of instruments, one of the PFT leaders emailed us the following comment:

*"I have found this a welcome process, and believe the KSRE system is better for it. I believe that we are better informed specialists and agents too, so I thank you."*