

University of Nebraska - Lincoln
DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Cornhusker Economics

Agricultural Economics Department

2014

Measuring Community Development Impacts - It's Not as Easy as it Sounds

Cheryl A. Burkhart-Kriesel
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/agecon_cornhusker

Burkhart-Kriesel, Cheryl A., "Measuring Community Development Impacts - It's Not as Easy as it Sounds" (2014). *Cornhusker Economics*. 670.

http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/agecon_cornhusker/670

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Agricultural Economics Department at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Cornhusker Economics by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

CORNHUSKER ECONOMICS

University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension

Measuring Community Development Impacts - It's Not as Easy as it Sounds

Market Report	Yr Ago	4 Wks Ago	5/16/14
<u>Livestock and Products,</u>			
<u>Weekly Average</u>			
Nebraska Slaughter Steers, 35-65% Choice, Live Weight.....	\$125.96	\$146.00	\$147.00
Nebraska Feeder Steers, Med. & Large Frame, 550-600 lb.....	163.68	220.06	245.80
Nebraska Feeder Steers, Med. & Large Frame 750-800 lb.....	137.96	183.87	186.84
Choice Boxed Beef, 600-750 lb. Carcass.....	207.49	224.27	225.34
Western Corn Belt Base Hog Price Carcass, Negotiated.....	89.13	116.24	109.64
Pork Carcass Cutout, 185 lb. Carcass, 51-52% Lean.....	91.27	120.60	112.15
Slaughter Lambs, Ch. & Pr., Heavy, Wooled, South Dakota, Direct.....	115.00	134.00	136.00
National Carcass Lamb Cutout, FOB.....	282.65	369.64	369.40
<u>Crops,</u>			
<u>Daily Spot Prices</u>			
Wheat, No. 1, H.W. Imperial, bu.....	6.90	6.69	6.98
Corn, No. 2, Yellow Nebraska City, bu.....	6.98	4.64	4.62
Soybeans, No. 1, Yellow Nebraska City, bu.....	15.14	14.79	14.65
Grain Sorghum, No. 2, Yellow Dorchester, cwt.....	12.11	7.98	8.02
Oats, No. 2, Heavy Minneapolis, MN , bu.....	3.95	4.48	3.87
<u>Feed</u>			
Alfalfa, Large Square Bales, Good to Premium, RFV 160-185 Northeast Nebraska, ton.....	+	200.00	160.00
Alfalfa, Large Rounds, Good Platte Valley, ton.....	227.50	115.00	120.00
Grass Hay, Large Rounds, Good Nebraska, ton.....	+	107.50	105.00
Dried Distillers Grains, 10% Moisture, Nebraska Average.....	226.00	235.00	206.00
Wet Distillers Grains, 65-70% Moisture, Nebraska Average.....	92.50	68.00	67.50
+ No Market			

Every year policy makers at the local, state and federal level make decisions on the kind and amount of investment they should make in community development activities or programs. These efforts can be very broad and encompassing or very specific and tangible.

Transportation projects, housing subsidies and small business assistance education programs are just a few examples of community development efforts that are supported at the federal level. The funding of a community center, providing youth career education and supporting a day-care center are a few examples of either state and/or local community development decisions.

Suppose you are one of those policy-makers. You want to provide the citizens of the state with the greatest return on investment. What should you do? How do you compare these vastly different investments? It truly is like comparing apples to oranges. How do you weigh and balance these investments?

Another key challenge in the evaluation of community development activities and programs is that different groups of stakeholders need different information. A funder may need “big picture” results, and the community group that implemented the project may need very specific information, such as what technique got the most people involved in the effort. Often different information needs to be gathered in different ways. So what sounds like a simple evaluation of community development impacts may not be simple at all.

Complex Situation

Typically, policymakers have looked to the past for answers in identifying community impacts – did similar projects make a difference in the community or in the region? Usually there was some kind of measurement focused on what happened as a result of the project, and often the measurement was reported in dollars saved,

increases in revenue, jobs retained or jobs added, for example. The measurement was about finding out if the program or activity had reached the goals they had set out to accomplish.

Goal attainment is an important factor to measure, but this often does not tell a very complete story about the effectiveness or efficiency of the development activity or program that is being evaluated. The real story behind the effort is dependent on all sorts of factors – nothing at the community level exists in a vacuum.

This recognition of messiness and complexity in community development has created a new way of thinking about evaluation. The approach, called Developmental Evaluation, was highlighted in a recent webinar conducted on May 15, 2014 by the *Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement*. During the webinar, Figure 1 was shared, comparing and contrasting traditional evaluation and developmental evaluation.

Multiple Evaluation Needs

Another challenge with evaluating community development programs is that many of the entities involved need slightly different evaluation data. They use the data in making decisions, but their needs are not the same. For instance, a funder, who could be a governmental entity or a foundation, may need help in making decisions about sustaining, expanding or promoting the program. While an administrator of the effort needs evaluation findings that help them make decisions on how to staff the program, if future programs are needed, what coordination is needed and if partnerships are adequate or should be expanded. These multiple needs are illustrated in Figure 2, also shared during the *Tamarack* webinar.

So what does this mean for those working in the area of community development? Acknowledging both of these issues, the complexity of the community situation and the differing stakeholder needs of the evaluation data can be the first step on the path to capturing meaningful impacts.

Before professionals can identify outcome indicators and methods to glean evaluation data, they need to understand the environment they are working in and how their effort interacts with other components within the community. They also need to realize up front, that the word “evaluation” means different things to different

groups, depending on what kinds of decisions need to be made in the future.

Measuring community development impacts....just is not as easy as it sounds.

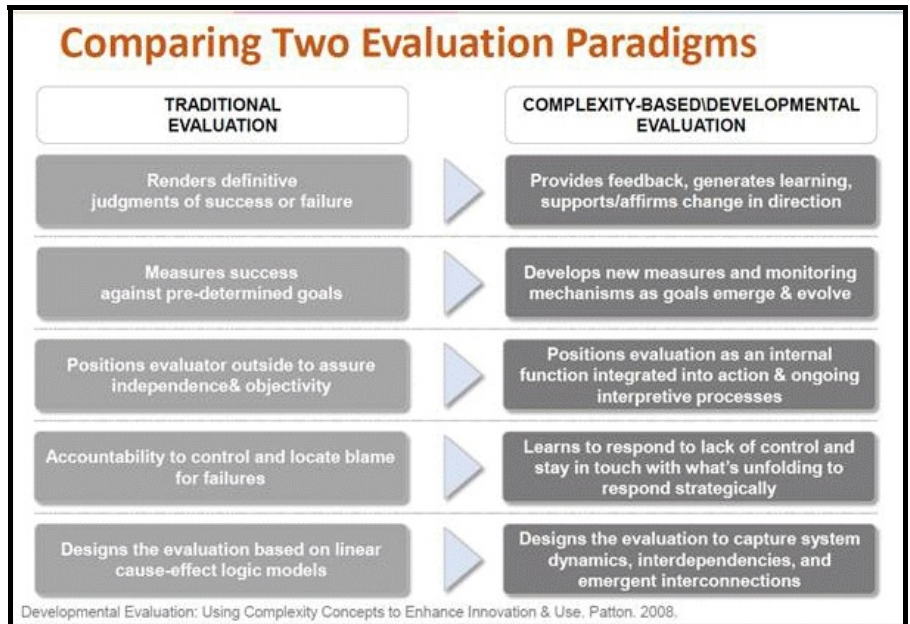


Figure 1.

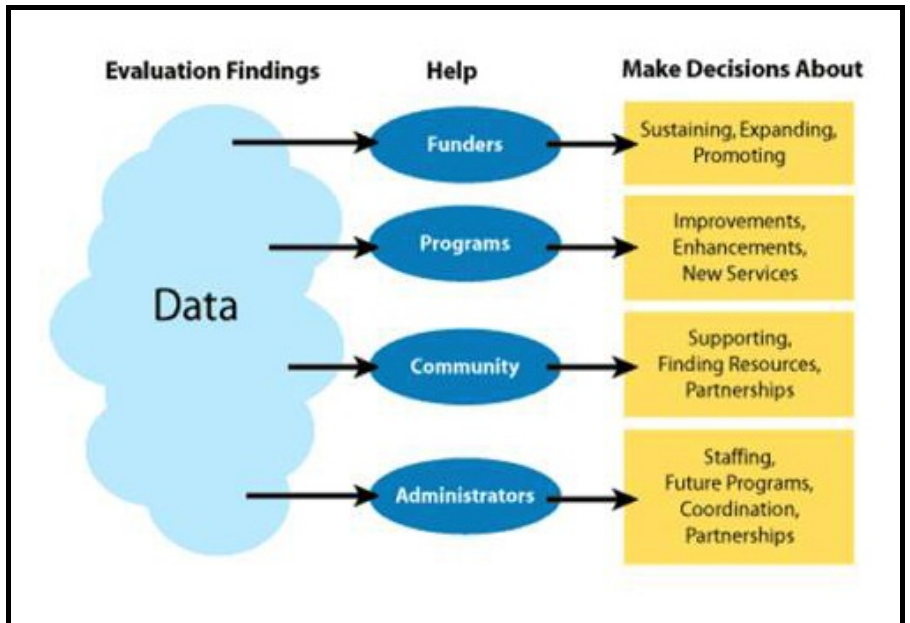


Figure 2.

References:

“Evaluating Collective Impact: 6 Simple Rules,” a Webinar presented by Liz Weaver and Mark Cabaj, under the direction of the *Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement*, May 15, 2014.

Cheryl Burkhart-Kriesel, (308) 632-1234
 Associate Professor and Extension Specialist
 Community Vitality
 Panhandle Research & Extension Center
 University of Nebraska-Lincoln
cburkhartkriesel1@unl.edu