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Florida Cooperative Extension Service

Reporting Evaluation Results of Extension Programs[1]

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The literature on reporting evaluation results reveals there are but a few hard and fast rules about how one should accomplish this task. However, the literature does provide many suggestions that appear to be logical in most reporting situations. This document will discuss steps that should help one report evaluation findings effectively to various audiences.

AUDIENCES OF EVALUATION RESULTS

It is important for the evaluator or the educator (they may be the same) to deliberately identify those who can make use of the evaluation results. This includes people in supervision, administration, program participants, advisory groups and funders of the program, both private and public. The general public are important stakeholders if the program is supported by public funds. Lobbyists and aides to public policy and decision makers are key people to keep informed of program results.

METHODS USED TO COMMUNICATE EVALUATION RESULTS

Evaluation reports are generally communicated either orally or in some written report. Whichever method you choose to use, there are several factors that should be considered before the report is prepared. Kuipers (1992) views the age of the computer as responsible for changing the way reports are prepared and presented. The computer has made it rather easy to generate information for reports. The "downside" of this situation is that today's administrators and policy makers are inundated with generated reports. Time is limited and many reports are never read by critical decision makers. Therefore, it is important to have a good understanding of reporting. There are some general guidelines that should be considered when reporting evaluation results.

1. Audience

- Learn as much as possible about your audience.

- Most people can be divided into "readers" or "listeners," and some are both.

- Have some understanding of the amount of knowledge the audience has of the program.

- Different audiences want different information; know who wants what.

- Consider the education level of your audience. Keep in mind the cultural background of those interested in the report.

The audience's profession or occupation is a key to enhancing understandability of the report.

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2. Credibility

- Data should be objective.

- Data should tell what was found.

- Cover the major points only.

3. Presentation

- Good speaking and writing skills should be used but be yourself.

- Organize the report in a format that is easy to follow.

4. Data

Present data in a way that the audience can understand what was found.

5. Report On the Most Important

The busy administrator or policy maker generally is not interested in listening to or reading about all the details of a program. Therefore, report on the most important programs and/or the most important parts of a program (Kuipers, 1992).

6. Report Often

Many programs are complex and have many components. Many public agencies have several different programs. Again, according to Kuipers (1992), administrators and policy makers don't have time to review volumes of material or listen to hours of oral reports. Therefore, report in small amounts and often.

SPECIFIC METHODS OF REPORTING

Reporting with formal documents seems to be the most widely used means to communicate evaluation results. Other methods of communicating evaluation results in writing include the use of newspapers and magazines. For example, Extension agents might utilize a newspaper column to communicate to the general public the success of a local program. An exhibit using posters, with written information and pictures revealing before and after conditions, is also an excellent way to report evaluation results.

Written Report

Structure and Organization of the Formal Report

A review of the literature, (Fitz-Gibbon, 1978, Wentling and Lawson, 1975) reveals different structural components and organizational arrangements for the content of an evaluation report. However, it is important to provide structure and organization to aid in obtaining the meaning of the report. Structure is defined as the various "headings" or "sections" or components of the report. Organization is defined as the logical or sequential arrangement of the structure. Both the nature of the educational program and the nature of the evaluation will determine the structure and organization of the report. The following is a guide for structuring and organizing a report.

- **In writing an evaluation report the following components are essential:**

1. purpose of the evaluation

2. method (procedure)

3. results

- **Optional content would include:**

1. background information

2. expanded methodology

3. conclusions

The following are major points to be considered in writing the evaluative report:

1. Cover

- Use quality paper

- Include: title, date, source

2. Title Page

- Basically contains the same information as the cover.

3. Table of Contents

- Designed to help the reader understand the report.

- Include enough information to make it useful to the reader.

- Add sub-headings as appropriate.

4. Purpose

- You might want to include:

  - Goals or objectives; i.e., what was the Extension program expected to accomplish? This information could come from the long range plans. In addition, what was the evaluation to assess?

- Accomplishment of objectives?

- Side effects?

- Wide range of outcomes?

  - Background of the program(s) being evaluated:

    ‣ what is it;

    ‣ what could or should be;

    ‣ significance of difference between what is" and "what could be;"

    ‣ problems identified;

    ‣ profile of clientele.

5. Method

- This might include: population studied; the survey instrument; data collection procedures; and data analysis. Usually this is a brief section. It could also include evaluation design.

6. Results

- Display and discuss what you found.

- You may want to include "typical" quotes from respondents.

- Usually you would put most tables in the appendix where results are about different levels (input, activities, involvement, reactions, knowledge, practice change and end results) of an Extension program, arrange the discussion in the same hierarchy.

- Avoid evaluator bias in reporting results.

7. Conclusions

- Based upon the evidence that you collected, what conclusions can you draw from the data?

This section contains the agents' or evaluator's judgments about the results of the program.

- **Example:**
  Based on the findings that 90 percent of the clients' reactions were positive, Extension has a good image in Sunshine County.

- **Conclusions:**
  - Focus on objectives of the evaluation.

  - Deal with unanticipated results if they are significant.

  - Evidence must be in the report to support the conclusions.

  - Remember, it's important to let colleagues read and critique conclusions.

  - Colleagues involved in the evaluation should agree on the conclusions.

The Oral Report

When you report evaluation results orally, "do what comes naturally" (Fitz-Gibbon, 1978). Be at ease. This implies that you know your audience. Practice your presentation and make it interesting by doing a variety of things other than merely talking. For example, use slides, transparencies, and role playing. Get your audience involved by letting them ask questions and predict results.

Oral reporting may be either face-to-face or presented on radio and TV. Regardless of where the oral report is presented, be certain you are prepared. The following suggestions are presented regarding the oral report.

1. Do not read the report to the audience.

2. Stay within time limits.

3. Make "team" presentations with presenters rotating back and forth.

4. Communicate clearly.

5. Briefly orient the audience to what you did and why you did it. Give emphasis to what you found, your conclusions, and your recommendations.

6. Be enthusiastic and well prepared. Look like you enjoy what you are doing.

7. Use visuals to help you communicate.

8. Use percentages. They are meaningful to most people.

9. Use good graphics.

Who Presents The Findings of an Oral Report?

There is not a "hard and fast" rule about who presents evaluation findings of Cooperative Extension programs. The nature of the Extension program, the audience receiving the report, and a variety of other factors helps determine the logical person to make the presentation. The following is a list of potential presenters:

1. Advisory committee members, 4-H members, Homemaker club members and other clients are considered to be quite appropriate in communicating evaluation results. It is a common practice for Extension clients to report to other audiences.

2. The local agent will make many of the reports to administration, county commissioners, agriculture organizations and other audiences.

3. If an agency or organization other than Extension conducted the evaluation, it might be logical for this agency to report the findings.

If a written report is to be mailed to someone, it should have a cover letter explaining the evaluation.

Generally, any technical material should be in the footnotes. Technical material is that which may be complex or of little value to most of the consumers of the evaluation report. A formula to calculate sample size would generally be considered technical.

Use visual illustrations, charts, tables, and graphs where possible. However, they should not be expected to stand alone. Tables require written or oral explanation. The proverb "a picture is worth a thousand words," suggests that charts, graphs, and pictures add to evaluation reports by presenting the same material in a different format.

A summary or abstract may be placed at the end or beginning of the report. It's a brief overview of the report. It might contain the objectives of the program, major findings of the evaluation, conclusions reached by the evaluator and in some cases, recommendations. The summary or abstract should contain enough essential information to enable a reader to obtain a picture of the program and its benefits or accomplishments in a brief period of time.

Mass Media Reporting

Rocheleau (1986) holds the opinion that the public is generally unaware of program evaluation findings. The main explanation for this lack of awareness is because evaluators and Extension professionals have not used the mass media to disseminate evaluation findings of educational programs (Taylor et al., 1992). However, using mass media to publicize the results of a program must be done with care. It is well documented that (Garber, 1980) the media like to focus on the negative or failure, especially concerning programs of the government and other public agencies. Rocheleau's (1986) work suggests that, when using the mass media to communicate the results of programs the following guidelines may be helpful:

1. *USE CONCRETE AND INDIVIDUAL CASES*...the media opposes the use of analytical, quantitative, or abstract aspects of an issue. It is generally accepted that news must be personalized to be interesting to readers. Goldberg (1975) says there is a push in the press to present situations affecting many people by focusing on one specific example. This allows reporters to deal in personalities rather than statistics. Success stories are a good way to communicate evaluation results of a program.

2. *COMPASSION RATHER THAN COST-EFFECTIVENESS*...Graber (1980) reveals that formal program evaluation material and other

types of analytical or statistical information concerning programs takes a back seat in most media coverage of program. In the case of educational programs, evaluators and Extension professionals probably would have few occasions to use this approach. However, where appropriate, the sympathetic is more likely to be printed and read than the statistical or analytical information.

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