

4-1-2002

Writing Success Stories for Program Enhancement and Accountability

Rama B. Radhakrishna
The Pennsylvania State University, brr100@psu.edu



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

Recommended Citation

Radhakrishna, R. B. (2002). Writing Success Stories for Program Enhancement and Accountability. *The Journal of Extension*, 40(2), Article 24. <https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/joe/vol40/iss2/24>

This Tools of the Trade is brought to you for free and open access by the Conferences at TigerPrints. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Journal of Extension by an authorized editor of TigerPrints. For more information, please contact kokeefe@clemson.edu.



April 2002 // Volume 40 // Number 2 // Tools of the Trade // 2TOT2



PREVIOUS
ARTICLE



ISSUE
CONTENTS



NEXT
ARTICLE

Writing Success Stories for Program Enhancement and Accountability

Abstract

Success stories showcase Extension program efforts. In a time of greater demand for accountability and performance measurement, success stories provide a qualitative measure of Extension program success. This article describes the rationale, the need, and tips for writing success stories. From the accountability standpoint, success stories serve as readily available piece of information for program impact. In addition, they also serve as a communication and marketing tool and also improving the communication and/or writing skills of Extension agents.

Rama B. Radhakrishna

Associate Professor of Agricultural and Extension Education
The Pennsylvania State University
University Park, Pennsylvania
Internet Address: brr100@psu.edu

Extension agents are frequently asked to write success stories showcasing their program efforts and/or accomplishments. The purpose of writing success stories is to convey to the stakeholders the problem situation (may include who identified the problem and how it was addressed), Extension program activities, results, and/or impacts. Frequently asked questions in writing success stories include:

1. What content should be included?
2. What should be the length of the story (how many words/pages)?
3. Can charts, graphs, tables, etc., be included? and
4. What opportunities exist to share success stories with others?

The author reviewed over 300 success stories written by Clemson Extension agents. A perusal of these 300 stories revealed several weaknesses.

1. Stories varied in length from five sentences to three pages, suggesting no format or guidelines were available;
2. Stories lacked organization in terms of content, logical flow, and description of the problem; and
3. Stories provided no data to show program activities and were poorly written (sentence construction, grammar, spelling, etc.).

Tips for Writing Success Stories

As a result of the reviews, "Tips to Writing Success Stories" was developed so that agents could do a better job of showcasing their program efforts.

The "Tips" included the following.

1. **Rationale (Problem or Issue):** Explain in about 10 sentences the need, importance, and significance of your program to the clientele, community, county, and state. In other words,

describe briefly the problem situation.

2. **Objectives and Methodology:** What do you want to accomplish through your program and what methods did you use to collect information? *(Should not exceed 5-6 sentences).*
3. **Program Results:** What happened as a result of your program? Highlight major or significant findings/results of the program. For example, you may want to include the awareness or knowledge level of participants or what they need in order to solve a particular problem or issue. Using catchy phrases, quotations from participants, or facts and figures helps to get the attention of the stakeholders. Also, you may want to think of charts, pictures, etc., to illustrate the success of the program. *(Should not exceed 10-15 sentences).*
4. **Program Impact:** What impact did your program have on participants, families, and communities? Have people learned new things, and are they using them in their day-to-day needs? Are people doing anything differently than they used to do before? *(Should not exceed 10 sentences).*
5. **Future Potential:** What potential does your program have in the future? Help people understand your program's contribution to the well being of the society. *(Should not exceed 5 sentences).*
6. **Dissemination:** Well-written success stories can be published as "Exemplary Programs" or "Showcase of Programs" or "Programs of Excellence" in newsletters of professional organizations, conference proceedings, local newspapers, Extension publications, Staff Updates, Impact statements, etc., and some even can be turned into a journal article.

Extension administration, cluster directors, and other Extension professionals reviewed "Tips to Writing Success Stories" and were pleased with the format and guidelines. The Staff Development Unit offered several inservice training or workshops for Extension agents on writing success stories and how to use them in showcasing program impact. Cluster directors, in consultation with Extension administration, suggested that agents write at least two success stories each year relative to their major area of program responsibility. In addition, they also recommended that a reward structure be put in place to recognize agents with the top success stories.

Success stories tell our story and provide a qualitative measure of Extension program success. For organizations and its employees, success stories serve as a communication and marketing tool besides improving the communication and/or writing skills of Extension agents. Further, success stories can be used to write impact statements to meet both federal and state accountability mandates.

A Successful Success Story

A success story written by an Extension agent is showcased here.

Small Farmer Crop Intervention Project-Roger Francis, Charleston County, SC

Vegetable crops are an important part of the agricultural landscape in Charleston. Small farmers grow the bulk of the vegetables produced in the county. A major characteristic of most small farms is intensive crop production. Produce from these farms is sold through direct market channels and to local supermarket chains.

Although intensive farming is characteristic of these small farms, income is not steady. Small farmers generally experience significant reduction in income from farm sales during off-production season. The shortfall in income experienced during these periods is directly related to the absence of a diversified cropping system.

The local Extension office undertook a crop diversification project. The goal of the project was to identify and promote the production of suitable cash crops which could generate farm income during the off production season.

An informal study of small farmers was conducted to gather background information such as 1) reaction of growers to possible intervention in their traditional cropping system, 2) get the growers' input on the proposed intervention, and 3) identify adaptable cash crops with excellent market potential.

Crop selection for the project was based on the following criteria: adaptability to the area, maturity dates, and resources needed to grow the crop, and local market demand. To ensure success of the project, only crops with established market demands were planted. The decision to raise a particular crop was made by the grower. Guidance was provided to the growers regarding different crop options and the resources that were needed to produce the crop.

The project started with two growers planting a total of 1.25 acres of strawberries. At present, five growers are participating in the project, of which four are growing strawberries in 9.5 acres. Two reasons for the rapid and projected increase in strawberry production are high returns the growers receive per acre and demand for the crop. All information about production practices and variety selection is provided by the local agriculture Extension agent. Most of the crop is sold through on-farm, ready pick and U-pick. Some are also sold at roadside markets, farmers markets, and local supermarket chains. One grower has started to produce strawberry jam from his crop.

Crop intervention into small farmers' traditional vegetable cropping systems can be achieved successfully. One way of ensuring success is having growers' involvement from the beginning of the program. This will give growers a sense of ownership, thus reducing the risk of the program failing. In addition, having good background information on the grower's production practices and available resources is also very important. The growers should make crop selection and marketing decisions with assistance from the Extension agent. Furthermore, the crop being introduced should fit within the resource base of small farmers.

Copyright © by Extension Journal, Inc. ISSN 1077-5315. Articles appearing in the Journal become the property of the Journal. Single copies of articles may be reproduced in electronic or print form for use in educational or training activities. Inclusion of articles in other publications, electronic sources, or systematic large-scale distribution may be done only with prior electronic or written permission of the [Journal Editorial Office, joe-ed@joe.org](mailto:joe-ed@joe.org).

If you have difficulties viewing or printing this page, please contact [JOE Technical Support](#)