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Journey Mapping: A New Approach to Extension Program Design and Evaluation

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Abstract. With origins in service and human-centered design and customer experience, journey mapping is a research and evaluation method that allows users to visualize the journey a person or group takes while engaging in a service, program, or system. Using this method, individuals provide feedback on their experience, highlighting successes and challenges along the way. Minnesota Extension educators have utilized journey mapping in program design and evaluation contexts and have found great value in both. This article highlights three use cases which provide insight into lessons learned during the process and how Extension staff may use the tool in the future.

INTRODUCTION

The goal of Cooperative Extension programs is to improve outcomes for both participants and communities. Participant experience is an important factor in program success—and quality of experience impacts the outcomes of human systems. When the experience of using a system (whether an Extension program or a community-level effort) is poor, participants become frustrated, drop out, or fail to start. Though Extension programs and community initiatives are designed with the best of intentions and high-quality research, outcomes may falter if user experience is poor.

When designing and evaluating Extension programs, it is often important to fully understand participant experience; as the saying goes, we frequently cannot see the forest for the trees. Program logic models provide a comprehensive view of activities within an Extension program, but they do not describe the actual or intended experience of participants as they navigate a program. The Targeting Outcomes of Programs (TOP) model, proposed by Rockwell and Bennett (2016), assesses participant interest and engagement in an activity but is not designed to consider how a participant experiences each stage of a program intervention. One approach we now use to develop a better understanding of user experience at different points throughout Extension programs—and community-based efforts—is called journey mapping.

With origins in service, human-centered design, and customer experience, journey mapping is a research and evaluation method that allows users to visualize the journey a person or group takes while engaging in a service, program, or system (Shostack, 1984). Using this method, individuals provide chronological feedback on the service, program, or system, highlighting successes and challenges they encounter along the way.

Journey mapping has three main elements: mapping the service actors and stakeholders, investigating the relationships that are part of or affect the service, and identifying new or enhanced approaches (Polaine et al., 2013). The method reveals where services and programs are meeting participant expectations and where they may be falling short (Stickdorn et al., 2018).

HOW JOURNEY MAPPING WORKS

Service design is built around a set of philosophies and tools to create and organize optimal experiences. It focuses on improving processes and enhancing the user and worker experiences within service interactions (Stickdorn et al., 2018). The customer journey map is among the most commonly used service design tools. A journey map is a graphical representation of a service process over time from a user perspective. The basic process for mapping journeys involves the following steps:

1. Identify the experience or journey to be mapped.
2. Define the stages of the experience from start to finish.
3. Identify customers whose journey you wish to understand.
4. Engage the customers in mapping their journey, probing for both high and low points at each stage.
5. Review the map to identify opportunities to enhance or create positive experiences.

Journey mapping projects help identify problems and gaps in service (and program) interactions between users and service providers in social service, business, and healthcare contexts. While used within an Extension context to explore behavior changes, evidence of broader application within evaluation or program design contexts is limited (Silvert & Warner, 2019).

APPLICATION AND RESULTS

Conducting action research using journey mapping provides valuable information to both community members and Extension staff. Educators may use the tool for program design and evaluation, and community members may use it to better understand the complex community context within which their endeavors are situated.

University of Minnesota Extension educators tested the journey mapping model within both program design and evaluation contexts, finding value in both. This article explores three cases: a) evaluating the experiences of first-year member families in the 4-H program, b) designing interventions to welcome newcomers in a small rural community, and c) evaluating the experiences of entrepreneurs interacting with state and regional resources. Table 1 summarizes the use cases, including audience, purpose, process, and output.

We created a visual journey map for each use case, all of which are included in Appendix A. The provided examples highlight variations in how the final journey map may look. Figure A1 documents the high and low points in first-year member families' experience in the Dakota County 4-H program. All the touchpoints are color-coded to denote the different stages of their experience. Figure A2 illustrates how newcomers navigate their decision to relocate to a small rural community in Southeastern Minnesota. Figure A3 evaluates the experiences of entrepreneurs interacting with state and regional resources in Minnesota. These examples provide insight into lessons learned during the process and provide a promising model for Extension staff to use the tool in the future.

PROMISING PRACTICES

Testing this tool in three different applications provided an opportunity to better understand how to use journey mapping in Extension evaluation and community program design. We offer the following promising practices for other Extension professionals interested in using journey mapping.

ESTABLISH A FOCUS FOR THE JOURNEY MAP BEFORE STARTING

We performed the the 4-H program mapping process on a county level rather than the system level. 4-H is a huge program and differs greatly from one county to another, so this tighter scope helped to ensure commonality among the participants. As a result, we gained useful and targeted feedback, allowing for more prompt local programmatic changes. During the entrepreneur engagement project, looking at city and regional engagements added complexity, as there was an increasing number of players and touchpoints. Scaling the use of journey maps from process level to community level engages users of the system (rather than only the service providers).

Journal Mapping in Extension

Table 1. Journey Mapping Use Cases in Extension

Audience	Purpose	Process	Output
First-year 4-H member families	Learn about the experiences of first-year 4-H member families as they navigate the 4-H program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identified first-year 4-H member families to invite Brainstormed examples of stages and touch points within a “typical first-year 4-H experience” Conducted journey mapping exercise with the families, including group brainstorming of touch points, group ratings of touch points, and a follow-up conversation about each rating and feedback for future programmatic improvement Analyzed the map and feedback data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High and low points during first-year 4-H program experience New ideas for making 4-H more welcoming to new families Feedback shared with county 4-H program staff and state 4-H leadership team
Rural newcomers	Understand the decision-making process and integration of newcomers to rural communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identified newcomers Trained community members on empathic interviewing techniques to use during interviews with newcomers Mapped journeys of newcomers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New insight about pain points for newcomers Local chamber of commerce took action to solve pain points
Entrepreneurs	Identify where entrepreneurs found the most value from support ecosystem and where support gaps may exist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identified entrepreneurs who had engaged with a regional ecosystem Performed semi-structured interviews over Zoom with Extension staff Mapped experiences of six entrepreneurs representing five businesses Analyzed maps for recurring themes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identified five themes Shared themes with state and regional entrepreneur support organizations to inform future interventions

DEFINE THE STAGES AND TOUCHPOINTS

This is a crucial—and sometimes challenging—part of the process. It is useful to start by trying to understand the “work as done” (Hollnagel, 2016). In the 4-H example, prior to the official journey mapping meeting, the internal evaluator convened a brainstorming session with multiple program staff to determine what a typical first-year experience for new 4-H families would look like. Our objective was to determine the key stages of the families’ journeys and identify examples of possible touchpoints for each stage. Participating families found the list of touchpoint examples useful, especially given the amount of recall required.

GET BUY-IN FROM PARTNERS AND PARTICIPANTS IN THE PROCESS

Partners can help identify individuals to participate in a journey mapping interview and make any changes suggested in the findings. While some partners may be hesitant to engage due to the possibility of negative feedback, organizations with an eye toward continuous improvement found the process valuable for identifying what is working and what needs improvement in the participant experience.

CREATE WAYS TO CHECK YOUR INSIGHTS

Including mechanisms for checking the insight that appears on a journey map helps providers make real-time adjustments. Focus groups and interviews both worked well to capture user experience when interacting with the studied system or program. In all three examples, we created the visual journey map in real-time with partners and/or participants. During the entrepreneur ecosystem example, we shared the maps after the fact to verify and add additional insight.

BE HUMBLE AND CAUTIOUS ABOUT YOUR RESULTS

Like many other qualitative studies with small samples, it is important to use caution when sharing findings. It is not possible to make broad generalizations based on the outputs of this process. Rather, it should be considered a tool for developmental evaluation (Patton, 2010) as it offers insight for program leaders and designers.

CONCLUSION

Silvert and Warner (2019) have articulated how journey mapping may be used in Extension programming. When applying the method in three different Extension program contexts, we found that it is a valuable tool that can be applied in Extension's youth development and community economic development work. Looking ahead, we anticipate further exploration and testing of journey mapping as a participatory action research methodology and developmental evaluation approach for many Extension program areas.

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APPENDIX: JOURNEY MAP EXAMPLES

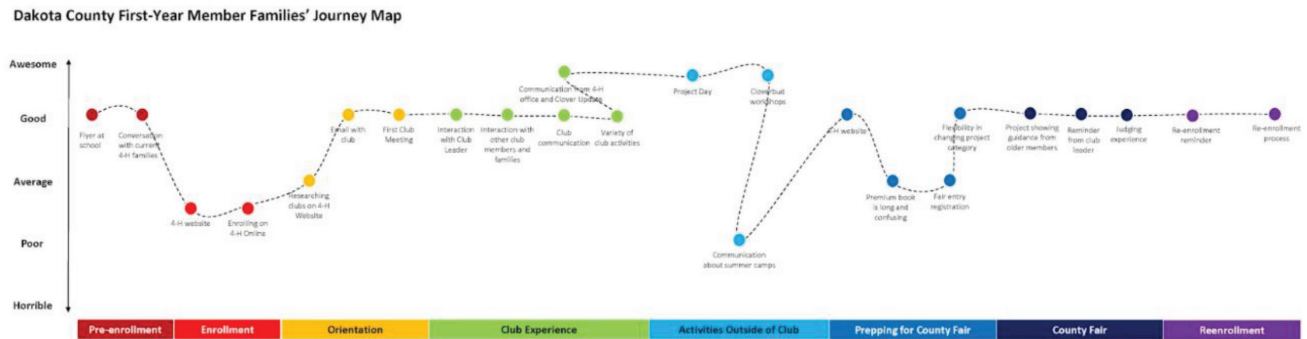


Figure A1. 4-H Journey Map.

Table A1. Newcomers to Community Journey Ma

	Aware	Investigate	Explore	Decide/Move	Settle In
Physical location		Online research	In car, first visit to town, bike path or canoe/kayak		Facebook page
Newcomer action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read news about the school Look for outdoor recreation opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Check radius from current employer Look for jobs Find a business opportunity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arrive in town via road, trail, river Visit a restaurant or grocery Stop at Depot 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need to firm up housing, employment/ business opportunities, transportation, necessities, school enrollment specifics, support services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meet new neighbors Get acquainted with town and local culture
Experience	Lack of awareness about what the community offers as a place to settle	Internet searches do not provide appropriate results (first page is Wiki not city sponsored pages)		Difficulty finding information about available housing	No clear point of entry for engagement or integration with community



Figure A2. Entrepreneurs interacting with regional and state ecosystems Journey Map.