

THE EVALUATION PROCESS FOR THE PUBLIC POLICY EDUCATION PROJECT

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How often do we conceive of evaluation as just a measure of accomplishment? Isn't it usually limited to a judgment of how well we performed in a teaching situation? The staff of the policy education project found it to be so used in many cases, and we decided that it should be more than that in our project.

In our first major planning session we asked ourselves four questions about evaluation.

1. Can evaluation be a significant element in an educational process?
2. Can it be used to stimulate an active involvement of participants in a workshop?
3. Can it contribute to an identification of program elements useful to participants?
4. Can evaluation be useful in promoting desired behavioural change among participants in a workshop?

We answered yes to these questions and we then proceeded to design an evaluation system that would be a significant part of our educational process.

The first element in the system was a survey of participants intended to identify them as to backgrounds, experiences, and interests. The questionnaire produced data much like you would put in your own biographical sketch, but two questions were asked about experience in public affairs education. We wanted to know how much our participants had been involved with local public issues.

The participants, who were selected by specialists and administrators in their respective states, were principally involved in community development programs. But there were also a significant number involved in agricultural programs, youth activities, and policy education.

The second element in the evaluation system was designed to provide feedback during the course of the workshop. A committee of participants, one from each state, was chosen by participants to

counsel with the workshop staff on matters relating to organization and conduct of the workshop. Staff met with the committee regularly to receive criticisms and recommendations. Some adjustments were made in the content and extent of the program in response to participants' preferences.

An evaluation of the workshop was the third element in the system. It included specific questions about the program, the facilities, the resource persons and materials, and the organized discussions and games. But there were also requests for evaluation of the workshop in relation to expectations and needs. These were made because we anticipated that the workshop might be repeated in other regions. We wanted to be able to recommend changes in format, program, or methods of presentation of ideas and materials. Response was good. Sufficient confidence in the interests and intentions of the staff had been created during the workshop to permit free expression of feelings about the workshop.

The fourth element in the evaluational system was the newsletter, which we used to maintain communication with participants in the workshop. In it were reported the plans for public policy education made by the participants, their activities as they became involved with local policy issues, informational materials available which were relevant to their educational activities, and news of personal accomplishments. It was possible also for participants to request assistance from staff and other participants.

Prior to the follow-up workshop at Boise, participants were again surveyed to ascertain the kinds of policy education experiences they had enjoyed since the Otter Rock workshop and the needs for further training which they felt, given their experiences. This fifth element in the evaluational system was important to the determination of program content for the follow-up workshop. From the responses the staff was able to identify activities (case studies) to be used to illustrate public policy education in communities and informational needs to be addressed by the staff and other resource persons.

The follow-up workshop was evaluated in much the same way that the Otter Rock workshop was assessed. This was the sixth element in the evaluational system. There was considerable satisfaction with the whole educational effort, but there were certain needs expressed which are significant to continue productivity of participants. They quite obviously wish for continuing communication with their colleagues, the state policy specialists, and with the workshop staff. This communication would be not only informative but supportive of them in their policy education programs. They

wish also for continued training within their states, opportunities to further explore the methodology of public policy education, and regular refreshment in terms of the subject matter of policy issues.

The newsletter will be continued as a means of communication among participants, specialists, and staff. The in-state training and other activities will be the responsibility of the policy specialists. A report of the whole policy training effort will be prepared if resources can be found to support it. Participants have asked for it, and it will be a logical conclusion of the evaluative system for the project. We hope for that conclusion.

PART VI

Rural Leadership Development

