

DEVELOPMENT AND EXECUTION OF A PUBLIC POLICY EDUCATION PROGRAM

Organizational Requirements

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Our focus today has been on “doing the job” with staffs of different sizes. Actually, of course, this focus relates to state extension services whose staffs range in number from 100 to 1,000, not one-half man, one man, or three or four men. I would argue that the marginal returns are high in engaging some of this group in the whole program development—planning, conducting, and evaluating.

We are concerned with improving policy decisions. This task includes raising the level of people’s understanding of the true context of their existence. Improvement of policy decisions deals with specific problems and issues which flow from this context of existence. The gap between what is and what people would rather have constitutes the problems and issues of policy. These issues, articulated clearly, can be recognized by the whole extension staff as being tremendously important. And because they are, the whole system of 100 or 1,000 may become the relevant resources.

What is your competence in dealing with these issues? Past performance in farm policy education may be judged creditable. Likewise, your work in outlining and documenting economic and social change is commendable. But sensitive, important issues arise from understanding of economic and social change. They are close to the clientele, value laden, almost explosive in nature.

My final observation in this general setting is that county extension staff members live in a real world. Their real world poses the problem of responding to program pressures from the local people in the county and leadership from their state headquarters. At times these are compatible; at times they are competitive and in conflict. Do we appreciate the dilemma of facing east and west at the same time?

DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING

One of the cardinal principles of action is involvement in planning. The reality of involvement includes advancing proposals,

testing them, adjustment, negotiation, and compromise. Such planning clearly indicates the division of labor necessary in: (1) the development of subject matter to be used and (2) the operational plans which involve the director's office, supervisors, mass media outlets, and county staff. To achieve the goal of massive support and staff participation, are you willing to relinquish the simplicity of operating alone on your terms, particularly if a staff resource assigned by the director's office provides general leadership?

Let us assume that you are laying before the director's office the concern of a prime issue. What does the director's office need to know as it relates a specific program proposal to the leadership being provided for the direction of the total extension program? He needs to know:

1. The objectives, including the specifics of the audience to be reached and the behavior changes to be achieved.
2. The issue, that is, the logic for dealing with this issue, and the climate associated with the issue—its sensitivity, forces aligned for and against, etc.
3. When this will be done—what stages over what time period. How does one phase logically lead to another?
4. Costs such as visuals, publications, tapes, films, etc., and time commitments.
5. Legitimation necessary—with whom and by whom.
6. Cooperative relationships within the university and with other organizations.

Currently we are involved in planning an operation which may illustrate these ideas. From prior public affairs work, including feedback, from county program planning, from the actions of the General Assembly, together with the judgment of specialists, a program proposal was developed and laid before the associate director. He reviewed this proposal with the project leaders and supervisors. A favorable response prompted the naming of a work group. In addition to the public affairs specialist this group includes supervisors, a 4-H staff member, a sociologist, information service staff, an agricultural specialist, and the extension program assistant as the director's representative. Our task was to recommend program content and operational means for a specific issue.

The tentative plans of the work group were thoroughly reviewed. The associate director tested the general plan with the dean, university administration, state advisory committee, and state

leaders, including legislators. A new innovation in connection with this program is a "forced draft" research and data collection operation with a close deadline. Supervisors are planning their work, which includes county staff conferences, to gain understanding of operational plans. What is the important concept? It is that a concerted staff effort is formulated to reach and leave an impact on our clientele.

ORGANIZATION

Before moving to the organization and role of staff some general comments may be appropriate.

Public affairs education must operate in harmony with the total extension program, state or county.

Operationally, policy education programs must consider the lead time required. If county staff continually are given short lead time, they justly suspect poor management. This does not build a receptive attitude among staff.

Supervisors have an important training and counseling role in implementing the operational plan. Provide the opportunity for them to perform a significant task that builds their program leadership role.

With this backdrop, let us turn to the role of staff members in organization for the task.

1. Director's office. Appraise, test ideas with staff and leaders, provide over-all program leadership, mobilize an informal work group and commit resources.
2. Supervisors. Assist in planning, prepare county agent operational handbook, counsel with county staff on the basis of county need, arrange for physical facilities for meetings, open and summarize the meetings, participate in evaluation.
3. Production specialists. Assist in planning, contribute their competence and viewpoint in delineation of subject matter and methods, utilize the opportunities to relate the issue.
4. Information service. Participate in planning, help prepare subject matter materials, develop visuals, develop promotional material, provide access to mass media outlets in a supporting effort.
5. County agents. Receive training so that they may undertake a supporting teaching job, understand the issue and relevant subject matter, invite and deliver the relevant target audience,

participate in follow-up activities, provide a feedback to the work group.

6. Department head. Assist in planning, provide research and data, review materials, evaluate results.
7. Policy specialists. Identify significant issues, propose appropriate general teaching methods, develop quality subject matter, provide staff training and communication, teach effectively.

Has the public affairs specialist's role been dissipated? The answer is that his competence, a scarce resource, can now really be used.

In summary, issues at hand are close to the lives of our clientele. A sense of urgency commands a staff effort that engages the competence of many. You are faced with a choice. The easiest road is to run a traditional specialist program, compete with all the other specialists for the time of the county staff, support of the supervisors, and resources from the director's office. Our view moves from the man, to the department, to the college, to the university as a whole.