

DEVELOPMENT AND EXECUTION OF A PUBLIC POLICY EDUCATION PROGRAM

Requirements for Effective Public Policy Education

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The purpose of today's program is twofold: (1) to help relatively new specialists to gain more insight into the scope and opportunities in public policy education and (2) to permit the more experienced specialist to reappraise what, how, and whom to teach in his field of endeavor.

A changing situation has created additional opportunities in recent years for Extension to work in public policy. This is verified in the Scope Report of 1958, *The Cooperative Extension Service Today*, which identified public affairs as one of nine major areas of program emphasis. It further stated that "it should be crystal-clear that Extension's function is not policy determination. Rather, its function is to better equip the people it serves through educational processes to analyze issues involved on the basis of all available facts."

The Extension Services have had a reputation for being sensitive to the needs of people. Education in technological areas has been well received. Now many factors seem to point to a changing environment—an environment conducive to additional public policy education. The major factors include: (1) the increasing interdependence of all citizens in our society and the resulting social, economic, and institutional changes (these include, for example, the adjustment problems that stem from the technological changes occurring in modern agriculture and the impact of policy programs on various economic or occupational groups), (2) the growing influence of governmental decisions on people's daily lives, and (3) the changing political structure resulting from the decline in the rural farm population of the nation.

In some respects, the scope of public policy education is increasingly difficult to define. We can observe new educational activities and responsibilities. Many extension personnel, including specialists, have been assigned responsibilities which may be semi-administrative in nature. Some have been designated to provide

liaison between the educational efforts of Extension and the responsibilities of action agencies. The need for determining priorities in public policy work is clear.

Due to the interdisciplinary requirements of public policy education, the specialist must draw subject matter from economics, sociology, psychology, political science, and often technology. Carroll Bottum has suggested that the public policy specialist, in addition to competencies required of any extension worker, needs at least five additional characteristics:

1. An understanding of the decision-making process.
2. An understanding of government.
3. An understanding of economic and physical relationships and the ability to analyze them.
4. A sensitivity to the goals, attitudes, and values of people.
5. An understanding of group dynamics.

Even with these difficulties of describing the nature of public policy work, a going program needs to be organized. Herein, the public policy specialist has leadership responsibilities. Many questions need to be answered by administrators and specialists. Let me mention just a few:

1. Should educational efforts be concentrated on rural people or on all people without regard to location or economic sector?
2. Should educational activities be focused on recognized leaders or on the masses?
3. How many subject matter areas can be treated concurrently for an effective program? Should the specialist concentrate on a few issues, or should he assemble and disseminate information from any relevant source?
4. Under what conditions are different educational techniques appropriate—that is, intensive efforts versus mass media. Should the same educational methods be used each year so that people can develop a clearer image of what Extension is doing in public policy, or should the methods be spontaneous?
5. What are the most effective means of disseminating policy information?

6. What is the role of extension administrators, district agents, county staff, and other specialists in initiating and carrying out a program in public policy?

Answers to such questions would differ among states depending upon many factors including staff resources. The number of extension economists assigned primarily to educational work in public policy varies widely among states. If persons assigned to implementing specific action programs such as Rural Areas Development and persons in disciplines other than economics are excluded, approximately 30 states are devoting one man-year or less to public policy education, 15 or 16 states are devoting one to two man-years, and probably 4 or 5 states are devoting three man-years or more. Certainly the question of whom, what, and how to teach will vary with staff resources available.

The presentations which follow include three articles by members of the task force and a report of group discussions. The purposes of these are:

1. To review the guiding principles of public policy education.
2. To cite an experience in determining program content, audiences, and educational methods.
3. To provide discussion opportunity for specialists to further develop a working definition of public affairs, explore the influence of staff size on the scope of an educational program, and to help determine priorities on public affairs issues.