Program-Planning Research

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Planning is generally accepted as an essential process for developing educational programs, activities, or events. It can be a simple process (i.e., planning a lecture) or rather complex (i.e., planning a long-range comprehensive plan for social and economic development for a depressed area). The process of planning has considerable influence on the success or failure of a program. The author briefly summarizes some aspects of a research effort directed toward analyzing the program-planning process as carried out by Extension. Most of the tentative conclusions apply equally to organizations and agencies which involve lay citizens in planning their programs.

RECENTLY there has been an increasing awareness on the part of adult educators of the need to provide the leadership for planning long-range action programs for entire communities or special clientele groups within communities. Furthermore, it has been increasingly recognized that the process of planning has considerable influence on the success or failure of a program. This realization has prompted many adult education researchers to thoroughly analyze the program-planning process in an attempt to identify concepts, principles, and procedures which could ultimately contribute to more effective planning. The purpose of this presentation is to briefly summarize some aspects of the research effort at the University of Wisconsin which was directed toward analyzing the program-planning process as carried out by the Cooperative Extension Service. Most of the tentative conclusions reported in this paper have equal application to organizations and agencies which involve lay citizens in the process of planning their programs.

Program-planning research at Wisconsin rests on the assumption that there are two basic concepts relevant to the planning of educational programs. The first concept is concerned with program planning itself, which is essentially a process of making decisions as to

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what should be the nature and scope of the objectives of the educational agency or organization. The steps involved in this process include: (1) collecting and evaluating facts, (2) identifying problems, (3) considering alternative solutions, (4) considering resources available for solutions, and (5) selecting one or more solutions.

The other concept relevant to planning is concerned with involving potential clientele (lay citizens) in the process of planning the agency's program. A basic premise underlying this concept is that "people, when provided with the real facts of the situation, and with good leadership, will identify the more critical problems with which they are faced."[1]

A Planning Model

In the early stages of the research effort at Wisconsin, an attempt was made to identify a framework or model which incorporated the concept of lay-citizen involvement into the process of program planning. Such a model was formulated and served as a basis for most of the program planning executed throughout the state and for the research conducted.[2] The model conceived of planning as being primarily a social phenomenon necessitating conscious interaction processes among people. It simply attempted to introduce structure and sequence into a highly complex phenomenon. In a sense, it was a deliberate attempt to cause professionals assuming the responsibility for planning to preplan their planning activities. The steps or phases set forth in this model were fully supported by literature and research findings in the behavioral sciences.

PHASE 1. *Formulating a broad organizational philosophy, objectives, policies, and procedures for program planning.* This phase of the planning process suggests that the agency or organization that is to provide the leadership for planning ought to formulate an organizational philosophy toward planning, identify what it considers to be the objectives of planning, as well as develop a set of policies and procedures to serve as guides for practitioners in the field.

PHASE 2. *Identifying and clarifying a need for planning on the*

[1] Lynn L. Pesson, "Extension Program Planning with Participation of Clientele," in H. C. Sanders (ed.), *The Cooperative Extension Service* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966), p. 101.
[2] James M. Kincaid, Jr., was originally responsible for developing the model. See James M. Kincaid, Jr., "A Suggested Model for Evaluating the Cooperative Extension Program Planning Process" (unpublished M.S. thesis, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin, 1962).

local level. This phase emphasizes the importance of creating a need for planning among the people of a community and legitimizing the planning effort with key influentials and groups.

PHASE 3. *Organizing and maintaining a planning group.* At this stage in the process, it is proposed that some decisions have to be made regarding (1) who is going to be involved in planning and (2) how these people should be organized so that they can perform certain understood and accepted roles and utilize appropriate resources.

PHASE 4. *Reaching decisions on problems and concerns and identifying possible means for their solution.* This phase includes all those efforts and activities through which the needs and interests of clientele are identified. It includes procedures utilized in gathering, assembling, and analyzing data describing the local situation; identifying problems as a result of data analysis; establishing priorities on problems; defining objectives in the light of the problems identified; and suggesting possible means for achieving objectives.

PHASE 5. *Preparing a written program document.* The final phase of the planning process is the preparation of a document (plan) which (1) describes the social and economic situation of the community, (2) identifies the major problems and concerns in the community, and (3) outlines general plans (recommendations) for resolving these problems and concerns.

Once the above model was formulated, it became the primary purpose of the research effort at Wisconsin to identify the conditions under which a more effective implementation of each phase could be brought about. To do this, two overall approaches were used:

1. The case study approach where the total process of planning in certain counties was appraised in light of predetermined criteria.
2. The observation and analyses of specific aspects of the planning process such as the identification of criteria for committee selection and the organization and maintenance of planning groups.

FINDINGS

Some of the more important findings drawn from the many studies completed so far are summarized below. Most of these have relevance to the concept of involving lay citizens in the planning process.

1. Training the professional adult educators who are to provide

leadership for planning so that they thoroughly understand objectives, policies, and procedures of the planning process, can significantly contribute to the effectiveness of the planning effort.

The effective operationalization of the program-planning process greatly depends on the extent to which the professional adult educator is informed about the total programming function. Several studies have shown that when professional staff members lack a common understanding of the planning process, they encounter difficulties in their planning efforts. On the other hand, those who have a thorough understanding of the planning process participate to a greater extent in developing plans and encounter fewer difficulties in the process.[3]

Based on the findings of several studies,[4] most difficulties and concerns of professional staff members seem related to: (1) understanding the total planning process; (2) clarifying and agreeing on the objectives of planning; (3) understanding the role and responsibilities of professional staff, especially in relation to local planning committees; (4) collecting appropriate background information and being able to interpret it; and (5) being able to identify real problems.

These difficulties obviously suggest a need for effective agency training programs to upgrade the professional competencies of those who are to provide leadership for planning in local communities.

2. Getting local people of a community, especially those in the power structure, to realize the need for and accept the concept of planning, through a planned process of social change, increases the effectiveness of the planning effort.

Several studies[5] have shown that when key individuals and groups

[3] Milton Edward, "A Study of Mississippi County Agents' Perception of Rural Areas Development" (unpublished M.S. thesis, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin, 1962).

[4] See Irene Beavers, "Iowa County Extension Committee Members' and Agents' Perception of Program Planning" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin, 1962); Richard F. Heard, "An Analysis of the Problem Identification Process and of Member Contributions of Two Program Planning Sub-Committees in Oconto County, Wisconsin" (unpublished M.S. thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1962); Wilbur Voorhees, "A Study of the Characteristics and Contributions of County Program Planning Committee Members" (unpublished M.S. thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1960); and Edward H. Wallace, "A Study of New Mexico County Extension Agents' Perception of Rural Areas Development" (unpublished M.S. thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1963).

[5] See Heard, *op. cit.;* Voorhees, *op. cit.;* Oscar W. Norby, "An Appraisal of Long-Time Cooperative Extension Progam Planning in Waupaca County, Wisconsin" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin,

are informed and involved early in the planning process, support for and significant contributions toward the total effort are made.

It is extremely important that the people have a favorable attitude toward and see a need for planning before the actual planning process occurs. In this context, the "social action construct"[6] could be most useful as a model to follow in attempting to bring about acceptance for and adoption of the concept of planning. "Planning" or "to plan" would be the desired social change, and the social action construct can be the tool to implement the change.

3. The development of an overall design for the structuring and the functioning of planning groups facilitates the process of planning.

Failure to organize local people into an appropriate structure (committees, subcommittees, identification of chairmen of committees and subcommittees) which clearly defines roles and relationships, results in lack of understanding of responsibilities, dissatisfaction with the professional leadership, and limited success in the total process.[7] Greater satisfaction results when a formal design, which provides for such things as the number of committees and subcommittees to be initiated, officers for each committee, and possible sources of information, is developed and communicated to all those involved in planning.

4. The degree of contribution of local people to the planning process is related to their possession of certain personal and social characteristics.

A significant portion of the research effort at Wisconsin was directed at determining the extent to which local people contribute to the attainment of the goals of planning. One of the early studies in this area was conducted by Richert[8] to identify factors which seem to be related to effective performance in planning situations. After a

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1961); and T. E. O'Connell, "A Study of the Decision-Making Process of a Program Planning Sub-Committee" (unpublished M.S. thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1961).

[6] George Beal, *How Does Social Change Occur?* Special Report No. 22 (Ames: Iowa State University, Cooperative Extension Service, May, 1958).

[7] Donald J. Blackburn, "An Appraisal of Various Aspects of the Extension Program in Columbia County, Wisconsin" (unpublished M.S. thesis, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin, 1964); M. P. Lacy, "The Effects of Involvement on the Participants in Cooperative Extension Program Planning in Waupaca County, Wisconsin" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1961); and Voorhees, *op. cit.*

[8] Marlys R. Richert, "A Study of Factors for Consideration in Membership Selection of County Extension Program Planning Committees" (unpublished M.S. thesis, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin, 1957).

thorough review of literature in the social sciences, Richert arrived at the following conclusions:

- The mere representation of people and interest in program-planning committees is not enough. The representatives should be individuals who exhibit leadership traits, whose perspective goes beyond their own group boundaries, and who are interested in the work of the program-planning committee.
- Community leaders selected as representatives should be those who are most aware of community problems, yet be those whose social and prestige status will not create a distinct differentiation of prestige status within the committee.
- It is unwise to include professional persons, such as teachers, social workers, etc., in the membership of a planning committee because they may be regarded by the lay representatives as persons of higher status. Then much of the interaction of the group will center around them.

Of course, this set of criteria opens the door for controversy as to who should be involved in planning.

Several researchers[9] used the direct observation approach of planning committees in action in an attempt to evaluate the performance of lay people and factors associated with positive contributions. A summary of findings of these studies is as follows:

- Committee members of higher educational level tended to have higher performance ratings than did those of lower levels.
- Committee members who were high participants in community organizations tended to have higher performance ratings than did members who were less active in community organizations.
- Committee members who were farmers or wives of farmers tended to have lower performance ratings than did other members.
- There was a tendency for those in the older age group (41 and over) to have higher performance ratings than did those in the younger age group.

In another study, Farrell[10] examined the feasibility of having influential people of the community serve on planning committees. He compared a selected group of influentials in a county with the total population on the basis of their awareness of community problems. The findings showed that influential people were more aware

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[9] See Heard, *op. cit.;* O'Connell, *op. cit.;* and Voorhees, *op. cit.*
[10] Glen M. Farrell, "Influential Persons' Awareness of Community Problems in Rural Wisconsin County" (unpublished M.S. thesis, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin, 1964).

of the problems of the community and were more likely to view themselves as being able to resolve the problems.

Inconclusive as the above findings may be, they do seem to point out that if the purpose of planning is to identify problems and concerns through lay-citizen involvement, then we ought to recognize that only citizens with special qualifications and characteristics are capable of meaningfully contributing to this end.

There may be situations in which the primary purpose of involving lay citizens in planning is not merely the identification of needs. For example, the purpose of involvement may be that of providing a means to legitimize the agency's program and to gain the support and confidence of clientele. Under these circumstances, it may not be necessary, or even desirable, to limit the membership on planning groups to people who possess special characteristics.

5. The effectiveness of the planning effort depends to a considerable extent on the orientation and training of those who are to be involved in the planning process.

Most research findings point out that when lay citizens receive special orientation and training prior to involvement in the planning process, they perform their roles more effectively and gain more satisfaction from the planning experience.

Based on research completed in Wisconsin and Iowa, it seems that the process of orienting and training lay citizens for their planning responsibilities should be directed at achieving the following goals: (1) a thorough understanding of the objectives of planning; (2) a thorough understanding of the facilities or means available to accomplish the objectives; (3) an understanding of the authority they have as they use means to accomplish objectives; and (4) an understanding of the importance of planning.

A study by Blount[11] provides some useful suggestions in respect to helping lay citizens understand the objectives of planning, the means to be used in planning, and the authority vested in them in implementing these means. Some of these suggestions are:

a. Proposed objectives, means, and authority structure must be clearly thought through, understood, agreed upon, and written down by those responsible for the development and presentation (the professionals providing leadership for the planning process).

b. The objectives, means, and authority should be logically consistent and stated in simple language at a practical use level.

[11] Roswell C. Blount, "Group Formation and Maintenance in Extension Program Planning" (unpublished M.S. thesis, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, 1960).

c. When an orientation session is conducted for lay citizens, the following points seem to be important:

* The objectives, means, and authority of the planning group should be presented both orally and visually.
* The orientation session should not be overdirected or dominated by the person(s) making the presentation.
* Adequate time, opportunity, and structuring should be provided to enable group members to discuss, internalize, understand, and accept the objectives, means, and authority of the group.
* The orientation meeting should be structured to allow for the performance of the following communication-discussion functions: receiving information and asking questions to clarify; evaluating objectives, means, and authority of the group; and suggesting, accepting, rejecting, modifying, or developing the ideas.

This research of Blount's on "group formation and maintenance" is an excellent example of how principles can be broken down into procedures and practices and empirically tested for verification. We need a great deal more research of a similar kind before we can answer the many "hows" in respect to program planning.[12]

6. The use of background information by planning groups presents one of the more serious difficulties encountered in the total program-planning process.

Background information plays an important part in the program-planning process in that it widens the scope of the knowledge that is the basis from which planning groups decide what the real needs and concerns of the people are in their community. Ideally, a planning group should have, either through the experience of its members or through the utilization of background information, a thorough understanding of all aspects of the subject-matter area being analyzed. When a planning group possesses a thorough knowledge and understanding of the subject-matter area, it can be safely assumed that decisions made by the group are most likely to be based on reason.

Of course the main purpose of utilizing background information in planning is to provide a means of comparing present use of resources with the desired use.[13] Any gap between present use and desired use represents problems or needs. This can be accomplished

[12] See George M. Beal *et al.*, *Social Action and Interaction in Program Planning* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1966) for a more detailed examination.

[13] Ronald C. Powers, "Background Information in Planning," *Journal of Cooperative Extension*, IV (Spring, 1966), 11-22.

only when background information is efficiently used by planning groups. Powers[14] suggests three problems which he feels have contributed to the inefficient use of background information by Extension planning groups: (1) Background information is not presented in a framework that shows the interrelationships necessary for understanding. (2) Background information is frequently just presented and not analyzed and interpreted. (3) Background information is generally presented all at once rather than developed from the general to the specific during several meetings.

It is hoped that future research efforts will be directed at investigating various ways and means through which background information can be effectively presented to local people, thoroughly analyzed, and objectively interpreted. This will undoubtedly facilitate identification of real problems rather than symptoms of problems, as has been the case in some past program-planning efforts.

CONCLUSIONS

Research in the area of program planning at the University of Wisconsin is aimed at continually appraising program-planning processes in communities throughout the state. Many counties have committed themselves to planning for total resource development, with Extension personnel providing the leadership for the organization and coordination of these efforts. This has given us the opportunity to study program planning under varied conditions.

While actual planning settings in communities do provide researchers with excellent opportunities to observe and study various aspects of planning, they do, on the other hand, impose some definite limitations from the standpoint of research design and experimentation. Under these circumstances, researchers often find themselves limited in the extent to which they can create unique settings for research purposes. This has been one of the main difficulties in planning research (i.e., the inability of researchers to design comparative or experimental studies in order to provide valid and reliable answers to the many research questions in program planning). Some examples of these questions include:

1. What is the most desirable geographical unit for planning action programs? Is it more desirable, for example, to have small communities initiate planning for social and economic development or is county-wide planning more advantageous?

2. When lay people are involved in planning, to what extent should

[14] *Ibid.*

professional agency representatives and voluntary resource people attempt to influence their decisions and actions?

3. How can the needs and interests of certain minority or disadvantaged groups be best represented on planning committees?

4. As groups of local people are led to participate in studying data for identifying problems, what is the effect of starting with a recognized problem and "branching out" from this point? Does the increased interest provide motivation for conducting a thorough study and analysis, or does preoccupation with the recognized problem tend to limit the interest of the group to the more obvious problems?

5. To what extent is participation in program planning by local people an educational experience for participants? In other words, to what extent do local people acquire knowledge, learn certain skills, or change certain attitudes as a result of participating in program-planning experiences?

To answer these and many other questions, there is a definite need for more vigorous research activity in the area of program planning and closer working relationships between researchers at the various institutions who happen to be doing similar research.

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THE EDITOR'S ERROR: In the article by Everson and Apps (Winter 1967 issue) errors were introduced in the process of editing. On page 207, 12th line, the sentence as printed reads "Of these, 89 were in the higher socioeconomic group and 69 were in the lower." The sentence *should* read "Of these, 69 were in the higher socioeconomic group and 89 were in the lower." The same error is repeated on page 212 in conclusion 1. The last sentence in conclusion 1, as printed, reads "However, a smaller proportion of youth of lower socioeconomic status are nonparticipators than is the case for those of higher socioeconomic status." The sentence *should* read "However, a larger proportion of youth of lower socioeconomic status are nonparticipators than is the case for those of higher status."   —G. L. CARTER, JR.