

idea corner

Luring New Audiences by Research

Extension agents, in their desire to provide practical information for families, are continually involved in identifying and reaching a greater variety and number of families. In Kentucky, a telephone survey that combined con-

sumer data collection with recruitment of additional urban clientele was chosen as a new approach toward enlarging and enhancing Extension programs.

Members of households in a prospective audience were asked to respond to questions during a telephone interview. They were promised copies of the tabulated answers from the study plus other consumer information.

The survey was designed to gather information about public awareness and use of the services of the Cooperative Extension Service (CES). It also collected data related to the knowledge of rights about advertised grocery specials.

Since other CES home economists have reported newsletters to be a successful way of reaching new segmented audiences, particularly urban ones, we decided to incorporate information from this telephone survey in a creatively designed newsletter aimed specifically toward the particular needs of urban consumers.

The sample for the survey, conducted from October, 1979, through January, 1980, was chosen randomly from the Lexington area telephone directory. The majority of the interviews were conducted from 4:00 p.m.-8:00 p.m., thus including urban residents who are away from their homes during the day. Of the 38 males and 162 females who answered the questions, almost 56% lived in 1- or 2-person households; 33% lived with 2 or 3 other people.

As might be expected in an urban, university community, the people surveyed were highly educated. Fifty-five percent of those interviewed had completed college or some post-secondary training. However, this group, whose ages ranged from 18 through 84 years, wasn't overrepresented with college-age

respondents since the average age was 42 years, and less than 15% were 24 years of age or younger.

About one-third of the people reported having previous knowledge or experience with CES; of these 64 respondents, about 65% mentioned home economics, 36% agriculture, and 31% 4-H.¹ Of all the participants, 71% volunteered their names and addresses for the mailing list; only 2% were already receiving Extension newsletters.

The study met the researchers' first objective, to identify additional clientele of nontraditional persons, because 68% of those surveyed had never participated in programs or received information from CES. The second objective, to efficiently reach more people, was also met since 71% of the participants have begun receiving newsletters. No additional money was spent getting the 142 new names and addresses.

This study shows that data collection can be multipurposed. Findings from such surveys can help improve the day-to-day life of citizens, which is the mission of the land-grant institution. And, the process can be used to identify and reach new audiences. Another benefit of recruiting audiences while seeking information is that the participants are often motivated to understand how their own knowledge and behavior relates to their fellow citizens. They also seem to have a heightened interest in the public policy and educational programs related to the research findings.

A need still exists for evaluating the methods we use to reach people. We must assess the total energy cost of each method from the standpoint of the client's use as well as the personal and professional investments made by

the agents. As CES continues to grow, especially in urban areas, we must continue testing new and innovative methods of recruitment and program delivery.

Footnote

1. Percentages don't total 100% because some participants reported experience with two or all three Extension divisions.

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