

human values and program evaluation

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Should human values guide Extension program evaluations? Of course. Yet how do we ensure such an approach while facing the complex and demanding requirements of the modern era of accountability? This article provides some answers.

Extension programs place a high value on human beings, their needs, wants, and aspirations. We base our programs on the values of people. We accomplish this value-based programming by involving people, by communicating, and by respecting the people we serve in our planning, implementing, *and* evaluating.

The Problem

The era of evaluation and accountability has dawned for Extension. Though the need for and the potential benefits of increased evaluation and accountability are great, the potential dangers must not be overlooked. We believe that special efforts may be needed in this era to retain human values in Extension programs and in the ways we evaluate those programs.

Accountability Trends

Here are several accountability trends that have implications for value-based programming and evaluation. First, Extension program evaluations will increase due to greater pressure for public, formal accountability to funders, clientele, taxpayers, and others making decisions on resource allocations. These various groups want to know if Extension is: (1) working on high priorities, (2) using its budget wisely, (3) using the most efficient methods, and (4) having enough impact relative to its cost and the costs and results of other public programs. Several recent national reports on Extension confirm these

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Accepted for publication: May, 1982.

pressures and the need for more high quality formal program evaluation.¹

Second, "high quality" evaluation, to many, means quantification, technical measurements, objectivity, and defensible and scientifically collected data by which Extension can be compared to other programs.

Third, the demand for more evaluation to serve multiple uses is leading to proposals for systematizing Extension evaluation activities. The National Task Force on Extension Accountability and Evaluation (1981) has recently proposed such a system.

Extension has a tradition and reputation of relating to people's values. And, Extension also faces increased accountability/evaluation pressures. But, the dilemma isn't impossible. By acting now, Extension professionals are in a better position to take into account the various perspectives, values, and philosophies of particular individuals in programs and to have the answers ready when the system and organization require them. . . .

*Value
Implications*

Increasing the amount of systematic program evaluations emphasizing clear, quantifiable information and highly technical, rational evaluation activity can serve to erode the humanistic character of Extension programming. Evaluation designs that focus on quantifiable, generalizable, and comparative information often call for central control, for depersonalized information, and for passive respondents.² Such evaluations minimize or even exclude human subjectivity, reflection, motivation, and values. Prestructuring evaluation and accountability processes serves to diminish clientele and professional involvement in planning and conducting evaluations. Efficiency is valued over involvement. The possibility exists that predetermined evaluation processes and criteria may dictate which programs will be conducted and how they'll be conducted—in effect, diminishing the human, personal, responsive character of Extension program planning and delivery.

The Challenge

Extension faces an important, two-pronged challenge. Extension must: (1) maintain the human character and strengths associated with its work while (2) doing a better job of meeting program evaluation and accountability demands. These two requirements need not be contradictory. The demand for accountability can represent an opportunity to further

strengthen the quality and responsiveness of Extension's people-centered programs.

Humanizing Extension Evaluations

Evaluation Design

First, we must continue to design specific, relevant programs at the local and state levels as well as continue to develop evaluation models congruent with program designs. For instance, in addition to involving people in planning our programs, we must begin to make greater efforts to involve them in the evaluation of programs.

Many existing evaluation models, like those of Davie, Patton, Rippey, and Stake,³ can help guide responsive, accountable, people-centered evaluations of Extension programs.

These models assume that:

1. The use of evaluation results is more important than external validity, and that involvement leads to interest and use.
2. The involvement of all key interested people to determine their questions, needs, values, goals, and criteria will more likely establish a program's value and meaning than use of prestructured or standardized evaluation designs.
3. Open lines of communication should exist between all people and program levels in evaluation.
4. Both qualitative and quantitative information are important in evaluation.
5. The real process of evaluation (that is, determining value) is and should be motivating and educational.

Extension programs *and* evaluations based on these assumptions are more likely to address the real concerns of audiences having a stake in any particular program or set of programs. Humanistic evaluations can and should be communicated to all Extension levels to graphically demonstrate responsive, accountable programs. Such evaluations allow and encourage people to judge programs based on their own values. Paying attention to these judgments will tell us how to plan and adjust so that future programs will relate to clientele values and concerns.

Planning and Reporting Roles

Second, the evaluation planning and reporting roles and responsibilities for all partners in Extension must be clarified. And the information, reporting, and evaluation systems must be consistent with a decentralized, responsive, and humanistic education system. The principles guiding development of the system proposed by the task force provide a good start:

... proactive to anticipate evaluation needs; systematic to plan, assess, organize, implement, summarize, and communicate information; cost effective to carry out highest priorities at least cost; credible to produce defensible results; able to meet internal and external evaluation needs; and structured to enhance national, state, and local capabilities.⁴

What Can You Do?

Initiate and Act

Many methods are available to meet external accountability/evaluation needs, and also maintain the humanistic character of Extension programs. First, as an individual Extension professional, initiate and act; be one jump ahead. Don't wait for the "system" to mandate what's to be evaluated. Take the lead in not only conducting programs, but also in actively evaluating them.

Make Central Part

Second, make program evaluation a central part of your personal programming behavior. Take frequent opportunities to reflect on the many values (positive and negative) your programs generate and invite others to do the same. Periodically, collect and report information on program values. Build evaluation of past activities into your planning for future programs.

Involve Clients

Third, involve clients in evaluation just as you've done in planning. Know the many and various standards, values, and goals of those involved in your program and those who will use evaluation reports. Seek out multiple criteria and determine the multiple values of your programs. Don't believe that a program has a single value. Also know and share your own values and goals with others. Draw on your professional values and the values of others to identify and communicate the truly important outcomes of programs.

Observe and Measure

Fourth, use observation and measuring techniques consistent with the character of the program. If your programs are dealing with such intangibles as improving the self-concept of 4-H members or improving the affective environment of families, your measurement will be different from those used if your programs teach farmers techniques of integrated pest management.

Communicate Human Dimension

Fifth, seek more than simple, quantifiable information in determining the outcomes of programs. Try to identify and communicate the human dimension of programs as well as the "hard results" to enable others to interpret, place meaning, appreciate, and relate to what has been accomplished.

*Humanize
Administration*

Sixth, humanize the way you administer program evaluations. This humanization is especially important in evaluations planned without client involvement or in centrally mandated evaluations where the purposes are preset. Take time to explain the purpose of the evaluation to clientele. Use cover letters from local professionals to communicate evaluation purposes, procedures, and results to clientele. Involve clients in interpreting results.

*Use Relationship
Wisely*

Seventh, use existing social and political relationships wisely and openly. Communicate in a variety of ways through existing natural channels on the successes and nonsuccesses of your programs. Encourage clientele to discuss your programs with others. Be an active and interactive communicator. Show people with whom you work, by your actions, that what they say is truly important. Seek feedback on how evaluation results were used by others in decisions.

Program Needs

Finally, and perhaps of most importance, don't let the tail wag the dog. Don't program only on those topics and subject areas where the results can be measured and quantified. Problems which societies, communities, and individuals face are becoming more complex and interdisciplinary. These types of problems are difficult to measure in a controlled way. Continue to program on the high priority, important needs of people—even if results are intangible and hard to measure.

Summary

Extension has a tradition and reputation of relating to people's values. And, Extension also faces increased accountability/evaluation pressures. But, the dilemma isn't impossible. By acting now, Extension professionals are in a better position to take into account the various perspectives, values, and philosophies of particular individuals in programs and to have the answers ready when the system and organization require them. To wait to make a commitment toward conscious, explicit, and humanistic evaluations will only increase the chance that later evaluations will ignore the values of the people Extension serves.

Footnotes

1. Comptroller General's Report to the Congress, *Cooperative Extension Service's Mission and Federal Role Need Congressional Clarification*, G.A.O. Report No. CED-81-119 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, August 21, 1981); James C. Summers and others, *Program Evaluation in Extension: A Comprehensive Study of Methods, Practices, and Procedures* (Morgantown: West Virginia Cooperative

- Extension Service, 1981); ECOP Program and Personnel Development Subcommittee, "Report of National Task Force on Extension—Accountability and Evaluation System," July, 1981. (xeroxed)
2. For more detail, see E. House, *Evaluating with Validity* (Beverly Hills, California: SAGE Publications, 1980).
 3. L. Davie and others, *Shapes-Shared Process Evaluation System* (St. Louis, Missouri: AERC Conference, April, 1975); M. Patton, *Utilization Focused Evaluation* (Beverly Hills, California: SAGE Publications, 1978); M. Patton, *Qualitative Evaluation Methods* (Beverly Hills, California: SAGE Publications, 1980); R. Rippey, ed., *Studies in Transactional Evaluation* (Berkeley, California: McKutchan, 1973); and R. E. Stake, *Program Evaluation, Particularly Responsive Evaluation*, Occasional Paper No. 5 (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University, The Evaluation Center, 1975).
 4. "Report of National Task Force on Extension," p. 1.