

tools of the trade

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Evaluation in Extension

Program Evaluation in Extension: A Comprehensive Study of Methods, Practices and Procedures. James C. Summers and others. Morgantown: West Virginia University, Cooperative Extension Service, 1981. Contact Robert Miller, West Virginia Cooperative Extension Service, for copies.

Program Evaluation in Extension is an important contribution to Extension's attempts to deal with a changed political and social climate. This description of the state of evaluation in Extension provides valuable insights into the issues and problems that must be addressed if Extension is to remain competitive in the political arena. Through interviews and mail questionnaires, the study examined how evaluation was being practiced and looked at the attitudes and needs of Extension personnel at all levels of the organization.

Several of the study's recommendations are already receiving attention. For example, the new accountability/evaluation system represents one attempt to provide greater specificity and clarity about national accountability needs.

Other recommendations suggest a more systematic approach to evaluation at all organizational levels, greater clarity regarding the needs and purposes of evaluation among different program areas and organizational levels, an assessment of how resources are organized and made available for evaluation, a call for multistate cooperation, and the need for increased staff development activities to better prepare staff for their roles and responsibilities in program evaluation.

With respect to current evaluation practice, the study found strong support for the perception that program evaluation is an integral part of program development. A strong tendency exists for evaluations to be used to strengthen and improve existing programs.

Extension leaders at the state and national levels were more likely to see the need for formal, defensible accountability information. Leaders at these levels need to do a better job of demonstrating the need for different types of data and provide agents with more feedback about the uses and benefits of the information they're already being asked to supply.

The comparison of attitudes and practices of evaluation across organizational levels and program responsibilities provides valuable insights for those charged with providing staff with educational opportunities in the area of program evaluation.

Most of us will find the study's Executive Summary and Volume I of the report (*Findings and Recommendations*) most useful for suggestions on how Extension's evaluation and accountability efforts can be improved.

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