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Enhancing Accountability: ServSafe™ Impact Template Delivers

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Abstract: Generating statewide impact data from Extension programs can be challenging. To streamline reporting, Extension specialists, with the help of county agents and administrators, generated a statewide impact statement for the ServSafe™ program in Virginia. This template includes knowledge gain, behavior change, and economic impact from participants generated from current standardized evaluation methods used

by all Extension educators across the state. Providing this template for agents resulted in easier, more consistent yearly reporting for those agents administering the program.

Generating statewide impact data from Extension programs can be challenging. Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) places strong emphasis on improving the organization's impact reporting (Franz & McCann, 2007). To streamline reporting and enhance data collection, Extension specialists, with help from county agents, generated a statewide impact statement template for the ServSafe™ program in Virginia <<http://intra.ext.vt.edu/reports/ImpactReportTemplates.html>>. This template was used by agents to report local impacts and contribute to a statewide impact report used by specialists and administration. Primary goals for creation of the template for the ServSafe™ program were to:

1. Increase number of agents using standardized evaluation tools to collect statewide data.
2. Enhance agent-specialist relationship where specialist provides the content template and the agent provides local data.
3. Pilot a systematic evaluation process by assessing the value of templates for VCE.

Previously, agent's yearend reporting impact statements varied greatly for the same program. This made it difficult for specialists and administration to identify clear impacts for programming across the state. Development of a standard impact statement template would help agents collect specific data that specialists need for statewide reporting and reduce workload for agents. This was a win-win situation for the agent and specialist and better communicated statewide program value.

Development of Template

A team of specialists with experience in food safety, economics, and Extension reporting drafted the template. The impact statement template includes a standardized relevance statement, with response and results sections for agents to enter data they collected locally. This is ideal because it generates a statement for the agent to use in their own locale, as well as one with standardized data for a statewide report. A draft was sent to two agents who regularly provide the ServSafe™ program for their input and reviewed by VCE's communications director. This enhanced the template's appeal to general audiences, including the public, stakeholders, and legislators.

Template Content

The relevance statement includes foodborne illness and outbreak estimates from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and estimates for the economic cost of foodborne illnesses estimated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) (Mead et al., 1999; FDA, 2004). To relate national information to Virginia, the average percentage of confirmed outbreaks and cases of foodborne illness per source (restaurant, hotels caterers; churches or potluck suppers; and schools) was calculated from Virginia Department of Health (VDH) annual reports from 2000-2006 (VDH, 2008).

The response section includes information about the ServSafe™ program, with space for agents to enter local contact information, including their name and locale the program serves.

The results portion includes knowledge and behavior change from participants and the estimated economic impact of the program. The knowledge change was generated from current standardized pre- and post-tests Extension agents give to participants during the program. Behavior change data is collected by Extension agents from a standardized 3-6 month follow up survey. Data collected from the follow up survey indicates behaviors altered by the participant in their establishment as a result of the course. These evaluation strategies are standardized and used by all Extension educators in Virginia.

The most valuable addition to this template is the economic impact estimates. Economic savings impact was calculated by extrapolating from published cost estimates (O' Neill, 2008). This was calculated by first dividing the range in estimated economic cost of foodborne illnesses (\$10 billion to \$83 billion) by the estimated number of cases per year (76,000,000) to get the estimated cost of each case of foodborne illness (from \$131.00 to \$1,092.00) (FDA, 2004; Mead et al., 1999). It was conservatively assumed that one manager completing the ServSafe™ program would prevent one case of illness. The estimated cost for each case was then multiplied by the number of managers completing the course to generate the estimated economic savings from the ServSafe™ program.

Finally, Extension agents are encouraged to customize impact statements by including additional information specific to their program. However, they are asked to complete the requested information and not delete specialist-entered content to maintain statewide consistency.

Value of the Template to Agents, Specialists, and VCE

Providing this template for agents resulted in easier, more consistent yearly reporting for agents as well as for the specialist. The specialist quickly generated the statewide data needed to support the program. Feedback from agents included such comments as:

- "It was so easy to input reporting for the ServSafe™ program, all I had to do was add up the numbers from the evaluations that I completed for my program, and plug them in."
- "This impact statement template is wonderful; it is really nice to know that we have support to provide us with tools to make our jobs easier."
- "We have needed this for a long time, this is an excellent tool to have for us to use."

The VCE administration found the submission of a standardized impact statement to be highly advantageous. All of the statements submitted during the 2007 yearly reporting process were easy to review, and the data was used for statewide, national, and stakeholder reporting. Since the creation of this template, VCE administration has encouraged generation of templates for other statewide programs.

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