

Building a Need for Evaluation Training

Capacity building is one of our most important tasks as evaluators in Extension. The challenges are many, and one of the greatest for evaluators is creating an environment where the need and desire for evaluation can surface. One of the greatest barriers to successful training is an environment where extension staff perceives that such training is imposed on them.

To create a strong sense of ownership for evaluation training this past year, we involved several stakeholders. First, the audience for the training, county agents and professional program assistants; second, their regional administrators and third, the county administrators in regions where the regional administrators include them as part of the leadership team for the region.

ESTABLISHING GOALS AND PROCEDURES

Meeting with the eight regional directors in May 2001, we established with them:

Buy-in?

First, a sense of need for evaluation training in their regions.



Second, their support for *regionally* designed trainings instead of one designed for the state and simply repeated in every region.



Third, their support for an evaluation needs assessment that could be posted on the web so that county agents in each region could express their views on what, *if anything*, they wanted included in a regional evaluation training.



Fourth, their interest, i.e., the regional director's interest, in reviewing the results of the needs assessment for their region with the program evaluator to identify the most prevalent evaluation needs in that region as a basis for designing the training.



DEVELOPMENT OF THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

In June 2001 an evaluator drafted an assessment that reflected many views of what capacity training should accomplish. The regional directors and several agents reviewed the assessment and recommended changes that sometimes broadened the view of what evaluation training should encompass.

QUESTIONS

The questions in the needs assessment were focused in three areas. Some questions asked about the agents' **current involvement in evaluation** in order to get some insight on where fresh, perhaps more inspiring ideas were needed. Topics covered:

Techniques agents found successful in evaluating programs *in the past*
Programs (& delivery methods) they intended to evaluate
Reasons for evaluating these programs

Other questions sought to discover the **decisions that agents found difficult** to make in the evaluation process, as well as the **evaluation techniques** the agents wanted to understand better, or have hands-on training on. The language in this section was purposely colloquial and user-friendly, avoiding as much as possible the language in research methods books. For instance, no where did we mention “control groups,” but used instead “knowing how to rule out other influences besides extension,” which registered surprisingly strong interest. In one region, 69% of agents wanted to know more about this topic which probably would not have garnered that much interest had the term “control groups” been used.

One other set of questions sought to understand the **demographics** of the audience in the organization and their **intentions** to participate in an evaluation training, if offered in their region. We include the questions in an appendix below.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE ASSESSMENT

Procedures adopted for the survey fulfilled the recommendations suggested by web graphic designers and survey experts to achieve two goals: increase accessibility to the web, and to increase response to the needs assessment survey. The procedures included the following. First, the web survey allowed respondents as much time as desired in the session to answer the questions, containing no time limit as some computer-administered surveys do. Second, it allowed respondents to scroll through the entire survey for an overview, or to change their answers before submitting the survey, establishing no limitation in moving back through the survey. Third, it allowed all respondents, especially those with low powered computers and web browsers, fast access to the questions with its simple graphic layout with restrained use of color, characteristics that minimize the need for computer memory (Nielsen 2000; Dillman 2000).

The needs assessment, developed for the web in software called Test Pilot, was ready to be posted on the web in August 2001. In using this software, we positioned all answer categories vertically under the questions rather than under drop down boxes, and positioned the place to indicate the chosen answer in front of each answer choice. All questions contained directions, such as “Click button on your answer below,” an option recommended for greater response (Dillman 2000). This software program tallied a summary of the data as it registered on the web, saving much time and expense. The quick turn around allowed us to plan and prepare for workshops as early as October 2001.

MARKETING

The marketing of the needs assessment and the two-day regional workshops centered on the idea that the agents would be contributing to the design of a workshop in their region, and thus creating a workshop more applicable to persons like themselves.

SOLICITATION

Part 1. This is an example of the letter sent by a regional director to the agents and other educators in that region asking the agents to participate in the needs assessment. Each regional director wrote their own letter in coordination with the program evaluator.

To the County Educators in the XYZ Region,

Given the extraordinary demands in running an extension program, you may not have had time to design an evaluation collecting the kind of data appropriate for a promotion dossier, application for seed money, bragging rights with legislators, or for program improvement. Additionally, many ideas from New Staff Orientation may have faded.

A N O P P O R T U N I T Y : To provide you with fresh ideas, new approaches and skills to evaluate your current programs, (our extension evaluator) is conducting a needs assessment for our region. As a result of your input, she will respond in two ways. First, design a hands-on evaluation training in our region this fall specially tailored to the requests of our agents. In addition, she will use the results of the needs assessment to supplement the training with information on a new evaluation website.

All agents in our region are requested to respond to the needs assessment so that all programs in the region are represented. Using a software program called Test Pilot (something you may want to use for one of your programs), the answers will be summarized automatically. Please go to the following website: (website), answer questions and submit by midnight on (date).

I will review the results with (our extension evaluator) and the county extension directors shortly afterwards. All professional program staff should complete the assessment and consider participating in the training in our region (or in another region if a conflict occurs).

The information you provide will reflect regional concerns and will influence what is added to the evaluation web site.

From the Regional Director

Part 2. Based on research that demonstrates that extent of response is dependent on extent of contacts (Schaefer and Dillman 1998), each regional director sent out two short e-mail reminders to county staff within the two week period they chose for conducting the needs assessment. Including the website address in the emails provided quick access to the assessment. Response rates varied among regions, from 67% to 89%. The region with the lowest return rate (67%) had extensive background and previous training in evaluation over many years, and provided insight as to the lower rate of response compared to the other regions. The agenda for each workshop resulted from the needs assessment in each region.

RESULTS

Seven out of eight regions participated in the needs assessment and a regional training this year, 2001-2. One is slated for the fall. Participants in the needs assessment received a copy of the results in their region.

The regional director in each region (except one who had to travel to the state capital) participated in the two-day training. Talking to their agents during the workshop in response to various questions that arose, these directors communicated regional standards to agents and county extension directors, and fostered a set of expectations for evaluation for the future, two achievements that were not necessarily part of the original goals of the workshop.

Seventy-seven percent of agents and county program assistants from the seven regions participated in one of the regional two-day evaluation workshops between October 2001 and April 2002 (N=310).

The results of the regional needs assessments now comprise a statewide vision for further evaluation capacity efforts on the program evaluation website.

CONCLUSION

To create a strong sense of ownership for creating capacity in evaluation this past year, we involved important stakeholders to legitimize, develop, and sustain a series of workshops. With all educators having access to the web, we turned to the web and the latest research in designing a web survey as a means to conduct a needs assessment, and receive the results quickly. We recommend these strategies as part of a plan to build capacity.

REFERENCES

- Nielsen, Jakob. 2000. *Designing Web Usability*. Indianapolis, Indiana: New Riders Publishing.
- Dillman, Don A. 2000. *Mail and Internet Surveys: The Tailored Design Method*. Second Edition. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Schaefer, David R., and Don A. Dillman. 1998. "Development of a Standard E-Mail Methodology: Results of an Experiment." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 62:378-397.

APPENDIX: Needs Assessment

1. Think about your experience with evaluating programs in the last 3 years. Think of one technique that you have used that worked well for you. This works for me:
2. How likely are you to select an extension program to evaluate in the next year? (circle number)
 - 1 DEFINITELY NOT
 - 2 PROBABLY NOT
 - 3 NOT SURE
 - 4 PROBABLY WILL
 - 5 DEFINITELY WILL
3. Think of the program you want to evaluate in the next year. What is the name of the program?
4. What program delivery method(s) did you use in this program? (select all that apply)
 - 1 COMMUNITY COALITION
 - 2 EXTENSION NEWSLETTER
 - 3 INDIVIDUAL HOME/BARN VISITS
 - 4 LEADERS/VOLUNTEERS
 - 5 LEARN AT HOME SERIES
 - 6 MEETING FOR A DAY OR LESS OR SERIES OF MEETINGS
 - 7 NEWSPAPER COLUMNS
 - 8 ON-SITE WORK PROGRAM
 - 9 RADIO
 - 10 SATELLITE SESSIONS
 - 11 SHORT COURSE (MORE THAN ONE DAY)
 - 12 TELEVISION
 - 13 VCR
 - 14 WORKSHOP
 - 15 OTHER...
Please explain other....
5. There are many reasons for conducting a program evaluation. What would be your reasons next year?
6. Planning an evaluation makes it useful. First, read over the 10 steps in planning an evaluation below and then select which steps, if any, you would want included at an evaluation training workshop this year. (select all that apply)
 - 1 DECIDING WHAT TO DO WITH THE RESULTS
 - 2 DECIDING WHICH PART OF A PROGRAM TO EVALUATE: IMPACT , DELIVERY METHOD , MARKETING, TARGET AUDIENCE , ETC.
 - 3 DECIDING WHICH PROGRAM IS WORTHWHILE TO EVALUATE
 - 4 DELINEATING THE PROGRAM'S OBJECTIVES
 - 5 ESTABLISHING A TIMEFRAME
 - 6 ESTIMATING COSTS
 - 7 IDENTIFYING STAKEHOLDERS WHO NEED EXTENSION INFORMATION
 - 8 KNOWING THE STEPS IN EVALUATION
 - 9 USING A LOGIC MODEL BEFORE STARTING AN EVALUATION
 - 10 OTHER...

Please explain other...

7. Several crucial concepts are important in an evaluation. Which, if any do you want to know more about? (select all that apply to you)
- 1 HOW TO GATHER BASE LINE DATA IN ORDER TO COMPARE BEFORE AND AFTER DATA
 - 2 HOW TO INCREASE PARTICIPANT RESPONSE TO AN EVALUATION AND WITHIN AN EVALUATION
 - 3 HOW TO INTRODUCE AN EVALUATION (FACE-TO-FACE, OR IN A LETTER)
 - 4 HOW TO SAMPLE GIVEN YOUR KIND OF PROGRAM
 - 5 KNOWING HOW TO RULE OUT OTHER INFLUENCES BESIDES EXTENSION
 - 6 KNOWING WHAT TO DO TO MAKE SURE EXTENSION CAN CLAIM CREDIT FOR THE RESULTS
 - 7 WHY SAMPLING IS IMPORTANT
 - 8 NONE OF THE ABOVE
8. How you implement an evaluation can improve the data you collect. How important is it to you to learn an alternative data collection method to the survey? (circle number)
- 1 NOT VERY IMPORTANT
 - 2 SLIGHTLY IMPORTANT
 - 3 MODERATELY IMPORTANT
 - 4 VERY IMPORTANT
9. Read over the data collection methods for evaluations and needs assessments below. Then select which, if any, would you like to know how to use for your program? (select all that apply)
- 1 CONDUCTING A TELEPHONE SURVEY
 - 2 DEVELOPING A MAIL SURVEY
 - 3 DEVELOPING CITIZEN EVALUATIONS
 - 4 DEVELOPING FACE-TO-FACE INTERVIEWS
 - 5 DEVELOPING FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS
 - 6 DEVELOPING OBSERVATION SKILLS
 - 7 USING EXPERIENTIAL METHODS (GAMES, CLASS ACTIVITIES)
 - 8 USING LOGS/JOURNALS IN EVALUATION
 - 9 USING PHYSICAL EVIDENCE
 - 10 NOT REALLY SURE, BUT I WOULD LIKE TO HEAR ABOUT NEW METHODS
 - 11 NONE OF THE ABOVE
10. Evaluations can be designed to measure several aspects of a program. Given the stage of your program that you want to evaluate, which, if any, do you want to measure in your evaluation? (select all that apply)
- 1 AFFIRMATIVE ACTION
 - 2 EFFECTIVENESS OF THE DELIVERY METHOD....*
 - 3 LONG-TERM IMPACT
 - 4 NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR FUTURE PROGRAMS
 - 5 TARGET AUDIENCE PROFILE
 - 6 OTHER...**
 - 7 NONE OF THE ABOVE
- *WHICH DELIVERY METHOD?
11. An evaluation requires skills even after choosing the data collection method. On which of the following, if any, do you want some hands-on training to design a more effective evaluation in future? (select all that apply)
- 1 DESIGN QUESTIONS TO MEASURE ACCEPTANCE/EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROGRAM'S DELIVERY METHOD
 - 2 DESIGN QUESTIONS TO MEASURE INITIAL IMPACT
 - 3 DESIGN QUESTIONS TO MEASURE LONG-RANGE IMPACT
 - 4 FORMULATE QUESTIONS TO MEASURE ATTITUDE CHANGE

- 5 FORMULATE QUESTIONS TO MEASURE BEHAVIOR OR PRACTICE CHANGE
- 6 FORMULATE QUESTIONS TO MEASURE INTENTION TO CHANGE
- 7 FORMULATE QUESTIONS TO MEASURE KNOWLEDGE CHANGE
- 8 FORMULATE QUESTIONS TO MEASURE SKILL CHANGE
- 9 MARKETING
- 10 TARGETING AUDIENCE
- 11 OTHER....
- 12 NONE OF THE ABOVE

12. After collecting data, it is important to know how to make it useful. Which of the following, if any, do you want hands-on training at the evaluation workshop? (select all that apply)

- 1 ANALYZING THE DATA
- 2 COMPARING EVALUATION FINDINGS WITH CRITERIA
- 3 DEALING WITH NEGATIVE OR LUKEWARM FINDINGS
- 4 DECIDING WHO SHOULD GET WHAT DATA IN A REPORT
- 5 DECIDING WHAT TO DO WITH THE DATA
- 6 PRESENTING AN ORAL REPORT
- 7 PUTTING TOGETHER AN EFFECTIVE WRITTEN REPORT
- 8 SETTING CRITERIA TO MAKE A JUDGEMENT
- 9 SUMMARIZING THE DATA
- 10 WRITING IMPACT STATEMENTS
- 11 WRITING RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON THE DATA
- 12 OTHER....

13. Will you be working on one of the POW Implementation Teams over the next 18 months?
(circle number)

- 1 NO
- 2 YES
- 3 NOT SURE

14. How likely are you to attend an evaluation workshop given in your Region (or another Region) this coming year? (2001-2002) (circle number)

- 1 NOT LIKELY
- 2 SOMEWHAT LIKELY
- 3 MODERATELY LIKELY
- 4 VERY LIKELY

15. What is your principal program responsibility? (circle number)

- 1 4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
- 2 AG AND NATURAL RESOURCES
- 3 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
- 4 FAMILY LIVING
- 5 OTHER....

Please explain other....

16. How long has it been since you participated in New Staff Orientation? (circle number)

- 1 WITHIN THE LAST 3 YEARS
- 2 4-5 YEARS
- 3 MORE THAN 5 YEARS

17. In what Region are you based?

