

The Publics in Our Program

Extension program depends upon organized efforts by people who tend to form around subjects of common concern

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THE EXTENT of program expansion that is feasible in Extension will depend upon how wide a range of interests we are willing to serve and how much financial support our publics will provide for staffing. It may be significant that our farm publics have been and still are the most politically potent of our clientele. This may suggest some very practical limits to expanding the scope of the program to serve other categories of publics; but, regardless of what clientele groups we seek to serve, it is important to recognize that such publics do not remain static. We should be alert to:

1. Changing publics resulting from the effects of our educational work.
2. Potential publics with whom we have not yet established productive mutual interests.
3. Emerging publics created by changes in society.

Extension publics have been classified by public relations committees and thoughtful students of Extension in a number of ways. Most such classifications differentiate between farmers and non-farm residents; some classifications recognize differences between people whose income, educational, and age levels differ. Such classifications are not used extensively in program development, perhaps because they do not fit practical needs.

There may be a different basis for classifying publics that can be useful in program development. Research will be needed to clarify some features of the concept, but much of the idea involves merely a different way of analyzing information already available. The key to the idea is that the Extension program depends upon organized

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effort by people, and that people tend to form organizations around subjects of common concern to them as individuals. One individual may belong to many organizations for different purposes. The Extension Service ties to these organizations when it shares their purposes in a mutually recognized way.

At least seven kinds of interests form the basis for publics:

1. OCCUPATIONAL—The central focus here is a means of earning a living. Most agricultural publics fall into this group, including the general farm organizations and the numerous specialized commodity associations. Programs of education in marketing are bringing us into working contact with a substantial number of new occupational groups in marketing firms—such as managers, quality control specialists, operations supervisors, personnel officers, and field men.

The techniques we have found successful in working with farmers appear to apply in working with other occupational groups, but the subject matter or aspects of the subject matter are different. Such work requires new areas of competence or specialization in our own staff and new sources of information within our parent institution. Limited experience suggests that we are surrounded by a large number of other potential occupational publics whose possibilities for productive collaboration with the Land Grant University are only beginning to be recognized.

2. GEOGRAPHIC—The central focus is area of residence or “community.” Such a classification is appropriate when the topic for discussion is community-centered. Examples include zoning, community sanitation facilities, public recreational developments, schools, and roads. Geographic publics are not always permanent entities with fixed boundaries but may emerge as particular issues arise and disappear as solutions are reached. In earlier days, a farm community may have been both a geographic public and an occupational public, with no need for attempting to distinguish the two. In today’s urbanizing countryside, the situation often is different.

3. CHRONOLOGIC—People have certain common interests that relate to their age or stage in the life cycle. Examples could be newly married couples, young parents, established homes, the golden age group, the single person household, and so on. Neither occupation nor location is necessarily a factor, and thus these publics seem to be separate from the preceding categories.

4. SOCIO-ECONOMIC—These are publics determined by income and certain related factors. One simple classification system uses the three categories of lower income, middle income, and high income. A more complex system developed by cultural anthropolo-

gists involves lower, middle, and upper classes and breaks each of these into three subdivisions (i.e., lower-lower, middle-lower, and upper-lower). Differences in interests between these groups can be identified. Extension has had far more experience in working with middle-class groups than with those at the opposite ends of the scale.

5. EDUCATIONAL—This one has not been clearly defined, but it is apparent that certain subjects seem to “sort out people” according to educational levels. The American Association of University Women, for example, seems to have a natural affinity with certain areas of concern that many other groups do not. There obviously are mixtures of educational levels in the publics of other categories, so there may well be uncertainty as to the usefulness of this particular item in Extension program planning; it may be pertinent where illiteracy is an apparent handicap.

6. AVOCATIONAL—We serve quite a range of groups whose avocational interests have a base in agricultural or home economics subject matter. There is a large potential for education with other avocational groups. There also are significant questions of public policy regarding how such work should be financed.

7. ETHNIC—In some areas, cultural background stemming from national origin and other sources is quite significant. It may affect both objectives and methods in program as well as defining the human groups that can be involved.

There may be a number of other categories of publics that research should identify. The purpose of this paper is merely to suggest that this classification of publics can be useful in analyzing present programs and in identifying expansion opportunities.

I HAVE briefly reviewed the *Journal of Cooperative Extension*. . . . It looks interesting. I believe the publication shows considerable promise because in my opinion Extension personnel now and . . . in the future will need to be as familiar as possible with the situations with which we are related, both directly and indirectly. Only through broad understandings of these situations and the many variables that exist within them can we be effective. I believe this journal . . . will be helpful, especially in this respect. The biggest weakness lies, not within the *Journal* itself, but within the ranks of Extension workers. Will they read it and let it help them? This is an individual problem.

—from TOM BRADDOCK, Assistant County Agent, Florida.