

Guidelines to Planning

**Planning properly done is an investment of time
that should pay high dividends**

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PLANNING is a positive, dynamic, useful, and effective term when the concepts involved are understood and applied. Therein lies the problem of many who are associated with program planning in Extension—understanding and application. When one really understands the concepts and principles involved he can devise methods and develop techniques in using those methods for successful planning ventures involving local citizens.

You recognize the value or need of planning for parks and open spaces in the city, of planning for transportation routes, planning for the security and education of the family, planning for a long trip, planning for your wardrobe, or even the week's shopping list. This planning you view as positive, aggressive, helpful, and essential. You know these kinds of planning will help make for the best use of your resources—money and time—and will help you achieve objectives of satisfaction or enjoyment.

You do not question the need or value of careful planning for a meeting, a speech, or a television program you are responsible for as an Extension employee. You know such planning will make you more effective—will help you achieve your objectives as a staff member of a public agency. So it is with what we call program planning. Properly done it will help achieve your objectives as a professional.

A major deterrent to progress in developing a common understanding of program planning is failure to communicate. To get us on common ground for this article, the word "program" will refer to that which is taking place by or through Extension personnel. The term may be used to refer to all of what is going on in Extension, to

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describe a single event or activity carried on through Extension, or to describe the activities and events which an organization carries out. Thus, the Extension program in a county is that which takes place by or through leadership of the staff. Some of it may be planned for well in advance; some may not be included in any written plan.

Program planning then is the process—whatever process you use—in developing a plan for a program or a set of recommendations or outline for action. Thus, program planning in Extension is taking place when you develop plans for a meeting or TV or radio program; when you develop plans for the 4-H Club program for the year; when you develop plans for a major educational project in some area of home economics, agriculture, or conservation; when you develop the annual county or state Extension plan of work; when you develop long-time Extension program plans; or when you develop over-all economic development plans, RAD (Rural Areas Development) plans, or comprehensive plans for developing the total resources of a county.

So when you use the terms *program planning* and the *program planning process* you must know and identify what kind of program planning you refer to. The process and the procedures vary a great deal between developing a plan for total resource development for a county, through involvement of local citizens, and developing the annual Extension plan of work by the county staff. Still another set of procedures will be followed in developing a plan for one major project within the county plan of work.

PURPOSE OF PLANNING

There are those, too, who are critical of time spent by Extension staff in “program” planning. One can only be critical of time spent in planning if the resultant plans are useless, ineffective, or inadequate in making efficient and effective use of the time and talent of the Extension staff and clientele (those to be taught). And if the plans aren’t useful in the action program, the criticism must rest on the planners or those guiding the planning process, not on the idea of planning. Planning properly done is an investment of time that should pay high dividends.

The first consideration for anyone who is to concern himself with a process or set of procedures for planning is to clearly identify the primary purpose of the planning process to be developed. Many have suggested that the purpose of planning is for educating those who participate. I submit that the primary purpose of any planning

is first and foremost that of developing a sound, defensible, and progressive course of action—a *plan*. In the process followed, many other benefits might accrue—such as the education of participants—but we want a plan which *can* and *will* be used. In developing this plan we do not want to waste the time of those participating in planning. Furthermore, we want support from any sources that might help get the plan used once it is developed.

TOTAL RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

Let me deal now with one kind of program planning—the development of a plan for total resource development. Some would classify this kind of plan as a county RAD or over-all economic development plan (OEDP). This plan is to be developed by local citizens with assistance from those agencies and institutions which have technical information and with the organizational and educational leadership of the county Extension staff.

There is a set of principles which may be used as a guide to the Extension staff in devising their own set of procedures—the planning process—to be used. And the success will be directly related to the degree to which these principles are activated. Principles are not something for the “ivory tower” or classroom only; they apply to and are vital to the practitioner. A very able person may proceed well without a knowledge and understanding of the principles, but the question is, how much more effective can he be with such knowledge and understanding?

Principles

The principles that follow were developed with the help of graduate students adaptations of principles found in the literature of education, psychology, and sociology and through many research projects in counties in Wisconsin and other states.¹ These principles also have the benefit of judgments from those with Extension experience. The value of practical experience in Extension planning covering fifty years should not be overlooked or under-rated. Well conceived and systematically analyzed experiences can be a valuable supplement to research knowledge.

Keep in mind as you review the following or any other set of principles that, in themselves, they do not give the answers. They

¹References to the many completed studies have been compiled in a number of variety of sources and ways. The author will be glad to provide sources of references to anyone interested.

set forth hypotheses or tested guidelines to use in developing procedures. Thus, one does not start planning with a given set of procedures—conventional procedures as some refer to them. You start with principles—a set of conditions—which if brought about should insure the development of a sound plan which *can* and *will* be used. Thus, the professional staff develops the planning process or set of procedures to be followed within a particular setting which will bring into being the conditions set forth in each of the principles.

1. *Coordination and efficiency of program planning efforts are enhanced when all members of the county staff have common insight into the process and common agreement on objectives, procedures, and responsibilities in the planning process.*

Without these two conditions—common insight and common agreement—there will not be coordination of efforts or efficiency in accomplishing the objective of the planning group. In fact, chances are very high that without such conditions the completion of a plan will never materialize, and both the Extension staff and citizens involved will likely find the experience frustrating. Both the supervisor and chairman of the county staff must arrange for whatever procedures are necessary to fulfill the conditions in this principle. These may be quite different in one county than in another.

“The process” referred to in both conditions is the planning procedures to be followed by the group involved. This requires that the whole process (set of procedures) be worked out from beginning to end. The very methods used to develop this design may aid in bringing about the two conditions. Developing such a design may take a considerable period of time. But once it is done, agents can then proceed with a positive, unified approach that is strengthened by the very momentum resulting from clear objectives, common understanding, and acceptance of roles.

2. *County program planning efforts are enhanced when the county governing board (county Extension executive committee or county sponsoring agency) understands and approves the process to be followed and its purposes and is involved in the process from the beginning.*

Elected officials of a county can and will take an active part in planning by citizen groups and may become intensely interested when they understand the purpose and see the interest of local citizens. Legitimation of the whole planning effort is often a key to its successful beginning and later use of the plan. For example, public

appointment of the planning committees and designation of Extension agents as coordinators of the planning operations by the county governing board lends status and dignity to the effort of the committees and answer the question for other agencies and local people, why is Extension giving leadership to this comprehensive planning? Other procedures for developing understanding, support and involvement of the governing board must be devised.

The effectiveness of the program planning committee is enhanced when favorable attitudes toward the whole process are present among county representatives of related agencies and their knowledge and suggestions are involved throughout the planning process.

Other things being equal, the effectiveness of the planning process will be greater when professional staff of other agencies lend moral support and become involved in advisory and resource responsibilities. What they say or fail to say to the right people at the right time can have a profound influence on the whole undertaking. Not only can they become the resource people for groups involved in planning (so Extension agents can devote their energies to over-all leadership), but they can help achieve the objective of the planning committees as they incorporate the recommendations into their own programs. This concept is many years old. The 1948 Joint Committee Report stated:

When agencies utilizing voluntary and democratic procedures find a way to coordinate their programs so that each makes its full and rightful contribution to the solution of rural problems, the following results seem to occur: (1) The agencies and local people jointly analyze needs and make plans for meeting them . . . and bring agency resources to the communities in a coordinated manner. (2) There is much higher participation of local people in agency programs. . . . (4) The morale of both agency personnel and local leadership is high. (5) The people are better informed.

There are many public agencies and institutions in every county that are concerned with development—with improving the social and economic welfare of people—that have programs aimed at the rural clientele. What a wealth of technical talent (professionally trained personnel) exists in nearly every county of the nation today! What kinds of attitudes develop in the minds of staffs of other agencies in a county where Extension introduces a broad and comprehensive program planning approach without their having been

U. S. Department of Agriculture and Association of Land-Grant Colleges and Universities, *Joint Committee Report on Extension Programs, Policies and Procedures*, Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1948), p. 22.

involved? These people have knowledge and resources that ought to be involved in planning.

4. *The acceptance and effectiveness of the efforts of the planning committee are enhanced when in the planning process there is intensive involvement of local people who can represent the people of the county along with the county staff and selected resource people.*

This principle is based upon the belief that local people, armed with pertinent facts, systematically analyzed and well understood, are capable of determining their major needs and of developing sound recommendations to meet them. It is based upon the belief that local people have good ideas and are willing to spend time planning. In several studies, local citizens have been critical of Extension for involving them only superficially. They are willing to invest time if there is adequate pre-planning, if they have facts to deal with, and a systematic, well-organized design for analyzing facts and coming to conclusions.

Intensive involvement is the key in this principle—intensive involvement to the extent (1) that local people come to feel they are indeed important in this decision-making process, (2) they know the existing needs and interests and understand trends and their implications, (3) they are able to and use facts in determining problems of major significance. Such a committee becomes committed to the plans developed; its members become real ambassadors for the action program—the plan becomes their program plan. It is axiomatic that people are naturally more interested in programs which they have helped to plan and for which they assume responsibility.

Another part of this principle has implications for identifying committee members. The literature is full of committee proposals, such as, a "cross-section of the people for whom the program is intended," or "equal representation of the various segments of the population such as age groups, socio-economic groups, and residence groups," or there "should be elected representatives from the various rural organizations," etc. A collection of adults does not necessarily make an able committee.

The principle says "local people who can represent the people of the county." Pure representation of groups is not enough. Care must be taken to get individuals who can be effective—people who have acceptance, who have particular kinds of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, who can and will set forth their views in front of others and help to analyze problems intelligently, people who do not have "an axe to grind" for a particular organization.

The challenge is to devise methods of committee selection which will assure this condition. Again, no set formula is foolproof in all settings. Professional Extension staff can find ways of doing this if they will get counsel from various sources who know the people of the county. Getting ineffective committee members or chairmen of committees is like hiring a crew and pilot for an air flight who can't fly very well. You may never make it!

Still another part of this principle calls for intensive involvement of resource people—people with technical information and professional training. They can do much to help put planning on a solid foundation. Some resource people may be needed in training agents, committeemen, and others throughout the planning. If not built into the planning design, confusion and dissatisfaction result from poor use of technical resources. Both the group and the resource person must be informed of the role of the resource person or he may dominate the group, lead it away from its goal, or fail to contribute when needed.

3. The quality and quantity of contributions from planning committee members increase when special orientation is provided them and provisions are made for various members to probe, study, and analyze specific program areas.

Two ideas are involved in this principle: one is quality and one is quantity of contributions. Surely the size of the final committee report, by itself, would be a poor criterion upon which to judge planning. If citizen members are to develop sound recommendations they must come to know facts, their meaning, and the various alternatives for improvements.

Groups perform better (1) when participants come to know each other, develop a group feeling, understand clearly their purpose and agree on ways of proceeding to attain the purpose, and (2) when their leaders have some understanding of group dynamics. This means special training sessions and specifically prepared aids for committee chairmen. Effective planning cannot come about until chairmen gain understanding and confidence. We do not expect professional people to start a job without some orientation or induction training. Why then expect non-professional people to perform a rather difficult function without orientation.

Another aspect of this principle implies a division of labor. Quality contributions are more likely to result when people can delve deeply into some one area such as agricultural production, family living, conservation, tourism and business, or industrial improvement rather than everyone working on all possible program areas.

A further implication here is that a meeting or two of sitting around a table discussing an area such as family living or conservation is not likely to result in depth analysis of a program area. Some means must be provided whereby committee members do probe and study and analyze prior to making decisions. Kempfer supports this idea by stating that

Many of the data required by the committee must be fed to it by professional staff. Specialists must be located and brought in at the proper stage to keep the committee and sub-committee informed, alert and stimulated. Consultant help must be available during the period of problem definition. . . . Continued staff work along these lines is necessary to insure the continuous development of advisory committees.³

6. *The effectiveness of the planning committee in developing an appropriate program plan is enhanced when needs and interests of the people are identified, applicable scientific, social, and cultural facts are involved, and the available resources are considered.*

One of the difficult tasks in program planning is that of making effective use of facts. Case studies and an examination of numerous reports of program plans developed under Extension leadership have shown that many facts are often hurriedly put together in some form by the county staff but such facts are not truly involved, understood, or used by committee members in making decisions. State staff members can perform a major service in planning by giving major attention to supplying and analyzing appropriate facts. Lack of such service is a major limitation to planning efforts at the county level.

Because participation in Extension programs is voluntary, programs must be based on needs or interests which people themselves recognize or can be led to recognize. Identification of needs and interests is complicated by the fact that people often do not know what they are interested in except in terms of what they know is available to them. Effective programs grow out of basic information and needs that people come to recognize, generally through study, discussion, tours, or similar means.

Available resources include the natural, human, institutional, and financial. The best of plans will come to naught if resources necessary for their attainment are beyond the potentiality of the situation. A planning committee for total resource development will

³ Homer Kempfer, *Adult Education* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1950), p. 82.

consider resources far beyond those of Extension, and beyond the county in some cases. The resources of all agencies, institutions, and organizations, as well as other governmental aids, are at the disposal of the committee and their communities.

7. *The effectiveness of the planning committee is enhanced when its efforts result in a written plan which includes specific recommendations; when, for each recommendation, one or more organization, agency, government unit, or institution is identified which should undertake the action; when the plan is made known to professional and local leaders in the county; and when those to whom recommendations are directed are informed that they will be invited to provide a progress report to the committee periodically (perhaps annually).*

Writing a plan (stating in black and white what is to be attempted so others will know) is a force to motivate the staff of any agency to make more use of committee decisions than would occur without such a written statement. Without being in written form, the program plan has meaning only to the relatively few closely associated with it. It has little if any permanence.

Recommendations become the meat of this whole citizen-agency planning effort. Citizen planning committees are not major action groups nor do they need to set up new action groups in many cases. For almost any recommendation that can be developed, there now exists some agency of government, organization, or institution that could implement or help implement the recommendation. However, in order to carry out some recommendations some modifications or changes in functioning of the existing institutions may be necessary: this is just the kind of influence local citizen committees ought to have on agencies, institutions, government units, and organizations that serve them. Thus, in the process of study—as they develop recommendations—participants in planning also should learn of the resources that are available to carry out their plans. A common fault of most plans is that general recommendations are set forth to the effect that something ought to be done. Everyone who reads such recommendations agrees; but no one sees them as recommendations pertinent to his work or that of his agency, organization, institution, or governmental unit. To know of recommendations, to be specifically invited to do something about them, to know a citizen group wants to hear later of progress is to encourage action (development) on committee recommendations. This is the objective of the written plan—action rather than just taking space in the filing system!

CONCLUSION

Program planning committees will be just as important, will play just as significant a role in developments, and will become just as intensely involved as the Extension staff sincerely wants them to be. These principles, and the concepts within, provide guidelines which can lead to success—but only if the professional concerned truly masters the concepts and *then sets forth his own set of procedures* to fulfill them. Success will be in direct ratio to this fulfillment, other things being equal. Extension agents associated in such a venture will have devoted a great deal of time over a one- or two-year period but they will have attained high prestige in doing so and satisfaction in the result. They may use parts of this total resource development plan each year for several years as they develop their annual Extension plans, just as other agencies and groups can.

One final word. These principles, with very slight adaptations of the conditions within them, apply equally well to many planning ventures Extension staff may be involved in with local citizens, in addition to planning for total resource development (RAD). Go back and study them to see if you agree.

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—*Forward Through Training* (June, 1964), Manhattan, Kansas.

LEARNING is the process for bringing about changes in human behavior. Evaluation of learning therefore consists of finding out to what degree the changes we are trying to bring about are actually taking place.

—RALPH W. TYLER.