

# forum

*The Forum is published each issue to allow space for Journal readers to express their feelings on any topic they think is important to Extension. If you have some strong feelings about what's happening in Extension education, we'd appreciate having your contribution. We ask that the Forum comment be no more than two double-spaced pages. Send them to Editor, Journal of Extension, 260 Coffey Hall, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, Minnesota, 55101.*

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Evaluation is vital to Extension's community development programs. The questions of "how can you tell that you did anything" or "how do we know when we're done" have haunted these programs from the beginning. The idea of self-improvement is good, nobody will dispute that. Self-help is in our Judeo-Christian code, but when dollars become too scarce to be allocated to those who can best show substantial results, community development educators must be prepared to measure the development. Improvements in communities must be apparent in positive differences from the beginning of program application to the end.

Early in the development of a community improvement program, when the basic need has been determined, the community development professional must plan for evaluation. He must design the program in such a way that the dollars and time spent can be justified by the program outcomes. Assessment of objectives isn't new to Extension work and adult education programs. We've long been willing to count the cost of programs, the salaries of workers, the mileage driven, and the contribution of donors. These *inputs* in traditional programs are just that . . . inputs and of little value without output or knowledge or results for money and time spent.

One crude assessment of what happened to the inputs of time and money has been the *activities* held or programs enacted, reflected in the number of meetings held. The inaccuracy of this assessment is compounded by the questions of what's a meeting and how many attended. A meeting can be a brief encounter by two people or an audience of thousands. Documentation of meetings also reveals little about their overall impact in the entire program.

The *reactions* of Extension clientele have also been a method of assessment measurement. Informal response of attendees at the end of a meeting is often used to gauge success. Interviews of people in a careful survey by trained

personnel based on an unbiased random sample are highly reliable; however, the evaluation of many Extension programs by the receptivity of the audience is suspect. The sample isn't likely to be random nor the interviewer unbiased and trained. This method of measurement is highly unreliable and the information obtained forgotten unless the reactions are negative and in quantity.

Evaluation efforts of behavioral change resulting from Extension educational programs are apt to be necessary in the future. Funding organizations are particularly anxious to know if their monies are bringing about the desired results and/or reactions. Documentation of positive behavioral change is the minimum level of evaluation necessary to convince these funding bodies to continue support.

The behavioral changes that educational organizations have been measuring in the past are familiar to all teachers. Good pedagogical technique at least pays lip service to the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains of learning—the measuring of change in the knowledge, attitudes, and skills of the participants.

Now it's necessary to add another facet to the affective or attitudinal domain . . . aspiration. Programs are often developed, such as the 4-H Careers Exploration, to bring aspirations and expectations of young people into closer agreement. This could prevent much frustration and increase efficiency in the process of developing a useful, productive citizen.

Measurement of knowledge and skill changes are relatively easy to document. The techniques are known and they're often directly observable, but the preparation must occur before the program, not as an afterthought to fill a requirement. Attitude changes are more difficult to determine, with the assessment often being indirect, unobservable, and, therefore, open to question. Nevertheless, acceptable techniques for measurement of the affective domain are available and training of field personnel is needed to keep them professionally competent as evaluators.

In the 4-H Careers Program example, a youngster may aspire to be a surgeon, but remain as a lifetime resident of Snowshoe, Pennsylvania. Snowshoe has a small clinic, but no hospital, and probably won't ever be able to support the practice of such a specialized doctor. Snowshoe, like many other small rural towns, has had, and probably sometime in the future will need, general practitioners of medicine. After participation in the 4-H Careers Program, our aspiring surgeon, still wants to live in Snowshoe or a small town like it, but has decided to become a general practitioner with some specialization in anesthesiology.

A simple pre- and post-test can then show that the original career aspiration has been brought closer to a

practical expectation if the youngster has the determination and financial resources to complete medical school.

Practice change affects the whole of society. Change of this kind can range from easy to difficult with respect to assessment. Extension agents can easily observe practice changes in seed corn use as farmers switched to the hybrids. Changes in tilling and harvesting techniques are noticeable by the trained observer, but changes in the use of birth control methods in a society must be discerned with more discretion than by direct observation. Nutrition educators, evaluating the effectiveness of these programs, are encountering similar problems. The permanence of the nutritional practice change has yet to be determined, if it occurs at all.

The goal of community development programs is to increase the effectiveness, efficiency, and equitability with which the community distributes its services, resources, and opportunities. Evaluation is necessary to assess how well a community is doing these things.

Evaluation can also assess the ability of a community to adopt the orderly, democratic processes from one problem to the next. Will the decision-making process used to solve a solid waste disposal problem be *spontaneously* applied to a larger land use difficulty? This is the acid test of the highest level of evaluation. In the end, the success of community development programs will hang on that question. The community and the society is either coping with change in an orderly, organized, and open manner or it's operating at a level less than it could to bring each of its citizens an equitable share of happiness, prosperity, and opportunity.