

forum

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Some Benefits of Internal Evaluation. The bottom line in program evaluation in Extension should be improved program delivery. A completed evaluation simply isn't enough unless the findings are subsequently used for better programming.

A critical issue is how to best maximize staff commitment in evaluation activities. We believe recommendations from evaluations will more likely be adopted if those responsible for program design and delivery are also involved in the evaluation process. This is the distinguishing feature of internal evaluation and a feature often not present in evaluations conducted by outside consultants or peer review teams.

Among benefits likely to result when internal evaluation is used are:

1. **Recognizing the expertise of Extension staff.** Programming may be thought of as a three-stage cycle: (a) seeking involvement, (b) developing and implementing an appropriate program, and (c) assessing program impacts. Internal evaluation assures that the cycle is completed by Extension staff. The skills necessary for program development and implementation—such as clearly defining terms, stating objectives, identifying outcomes—are also key ingredients in conducting sound program evaluations. Thus, internal evaluation recognizes staff can make meaningful contributions in all three stages of programming.
2. **More receptivity to findings.** When staff are involved throughout the evaluation, the findings are more apt to be “trusted.” The educational principle is involvement. People will be more receptive to findings from an evaluation design they helped create. Evaluations with only limited staff input are frequently viewed as suspect—“the evaluator doesn't understand my objectives, my clients, my environment, or my limited resources.” Such reactions could be legitimate. Not all evaluations are valid. But worse, those that are valid may fall on deaf ears because of noninvolvement of staff.
3. **Team Building.** New patterns of communication and cooperation can emerge when staff become involved

in an evaluation activity. Not only do staff learn what others are doing, but how they conduct their educational activities. Frequently, internal evaluation brings together state, area, and local staff to communicate about their activities, to plan and to implement a program.

4. *Increased introspection.* When Extension staff have selected program impacts as goals of an evaluation exercise, a greater motivation exists to understand why these are or are not met. Conclusions and interpretations of outsiders are more likely to be short-lived.
5. *Commitment to program planning.* By fully using self-evaluation, staff begin to appreciate the benefits of long-range planning—of stating goals and objectives, and of developing programs around these. Without the involvement in evaluation as the last link, the first two may be viewed more as bureaucratic requirements than good educational process.

These arguments shouldn't be construed to mean outside evaluations don't have merit. They do. But, we assert the benefits of internal evaluation have a greater potential for both the professional development of staff and improvement of Extension programs.