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Oklahoma County Program Reviews

Evaluation of program progress is important at every level whether county, district, or state. In Oklahoma, we believe the county Extension

program is vital because this is the delivery point of information and practice adoption. How the Extension program functions at the grassroots, county level is the true measure of program accountability.

To review programs at the county level, the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service conducts about eight county reviews across the state each year. Personnel from the county, district, and state level serve as review team members. A typical team has five people representing and reviewing each of the four program areas, with one member responsible overall.

With numerous personnel involved in the review process, a set of program indicators, or expectations, was needed. The county being reviewed needed to understand what the review included and the reviewers needed to have consistency in expectations.

Each assistant director of the 4 program areas worked with county, district, and state staff in 1981-82 to develop and pilot a set of program indicators that could serve as consistent standards. These indicators are now used by the review county in preparing for the site visit as well as by the reviewers as they ask questions, review materials, and write reports.

Program indicators for each of the four program areas contain similar, as well as, distinct items. For instance, a common item refers to the Program Planning Advisory Committee System (PPAC): for example, is PPAC well-organized and functioning to help implement programs for problems identified?

Another common indicator for all program areas involves the county profile. Is it well-developed, accurate, and up to date; understood and used by county staff and PPAC in program planning?

Programming concerns are evident in all four sets of indicators. Sample items include: Does your county have a 4-H Leaders Council? If not, why not? To what degree is the county director responsible for rural development programs?

Using the program indicators, the review team spends an entire day questioning and reviewing materials such as newsletters, plans of work, and reports. Two weeks following the review, a written report based on the indicators is compiled by the team leader and sent to the review county. Copies are also sent to related district and state staff for follow-up. Six months later, the review county responds in writing with progress made toward attaining standards.

Oklahoma Extension has found the use of program indicators extremely helpful in understanding the abstract question: "What is a quality program?" Each set of indicators is reviewed annually and revised as necessary. They provide a set of program standards in a very explicit way. The indicators, coupled with an on-site visit and six-month follow-up provide an ongoing evaluation of county programs, the most important point of program delivery in Oklahoma.

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