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Extension Program Development

The words *Program Development* seem to be relatively innocuous and self-explanatory. It would seem that they simply suggest a process to build a program of some type, requiring little thought, time, or involvement of human resources. In Extension, however, these two words represent the very foundation that a nationwide system of informal educational organizations is built upon. To us, as Extension professionals, these words describe a systematic process that is strongly adhered to when designing educational programs for communities and clientele that are: (1) Relevant, (2) Effective (3) Outcome Oriented, (4) Fully Evaluated, and (5) Interpreted and Reported to stakeholders. The process involves a strong commitment from the Extension professional, and local community leaders. Two major attributes that make Extension unique, and have assured our success, are that our programs are "Grassroots" driven, and research based. The Program Development process discussed in this newsletter will demonstrate how we continue to adhere to these attributes.

There is a wealth of program development models utilized by Cooperative Extension nationwide. Some of the more referenced models include the Logic Model (Taylor-Powell, 2002), the Targeted Outcomes of Program (TOP) Model (Bennett & Rockwell, 1995), the Cornell Cooperative Extension Program Development Model (Duttweiler, 2001), and the Extension Education Learning System (Richardson, 1994). The basic premise of all these models is that they enable the Extension educators to systematically plan, implement and evaluate educational programs.

According to Diem (2003) "The program development model typically used by Cooperative Extension incorporates" (pp. 1-2):

1. Needs assessment,
2. Development of program objectives based on the organization's mission to meet those needs,
3. Program planning and delivery,
4. Evaluation, and
5. Reporting the results

Boone ,Safrit, and Jones (2002) divide the program development process into three major sub processes which include planning, design and implementation, and evaluation and accountability.

Extension in Texas has utilized a Program development process that focuses on developing educational programs that meet clienteles' identified issues for more than 50 years (Marshall, 1990). Marshall (1990) stated that "our program development process incorporates the belief that local people have both desire and ability to plan and carry out educational programs to enrich their lives" (p. 4). Marshall (1990) reported that Texas' program development process focusing on engaging local clientele has the following benefits:

1. Extension educators stay in contact with the clientele that the programs are designed for.
2. Extension programs are focused on expressed clientele needs.
3. The Extension program development process capitalizes on the intellectual capital of the community to increase the quality of the educational program.
4. Clientele involvement multiplies the Extension educator's efforts in the community.
5. The process utilizes evaluation throughout the process to enable Extension educators to refocus and redirect program effort to insure relevancy of programs.

Texas AgriLife Extension educators utilize a program development process that provides a framework enabling them to identify and prioritize critical issues, develop educational programs and implement educational interventions to address these issues, then evaluate and interpret and report the results of these programs.

Boleman, Cummings and Pope (2005) state that:

> As Extension educators, we must understand our role in program development. We should be committed to developing educational programs to promote change in our audiences. In addition to specific subject-matter knowledge, we must possess knowledge about the program development process, so audiences get the most out of their educational experiences (p.3).

Texas AgriLife Extension incorporates elements of Bennett and Rockwell's TOP model (1995) and Taylor-Powell's LOGIC model (2002) to develop the currently utilized Texas AgriLife Extension program development model. Texas AgriLife Extension's Program development model is built on four basic phases which include plan, design, implement and measure. The specific steps outlined in the four phases of Texas AgriLife Extension's program development model are:

Plan
1. Identify the issue.
2. Define the situation.
3. Identify and describe the target audience.
4. Define intended outcomes.
Design
5. Identify or develop content for the topic
6. Develop the activities and lesson plans for delivery.
Implement
7. Deliver the content through appropriate methods
8. Measure customer satisfaction and program participation to determine needed changes

Measure

9. Conduct evaluation of entire program to measure impact
10. Report results to program stakeholders
11. Long term follow-up evaluation to determine economic impact (where appropriate)

Extension relies on the involvement of local leaders in all phases of the Program Development Model. Volunteers are involved in the *Planning Phase* through needs assessment activities including the involvement of the Leadership Advisory Board. Program Planning, Delivery, and Evaluation are heavily dependent upon the involvement of planning groups such as Program Area Committees, Task Forces and Coalitions. Interpreting and Reporting Results involves volunteers as well, as that step is a major function of the Leadership Advisory Board. Thus, validating the fact that the Program Development Process is not designed to be implemented by staff working independently, but to be a process to engage local community leaders in developing Extension educational efforts to improve the conditions of communities and the lives affected by them.

Extension educators who have the capacity to work with local leaders to identify issues effectively, prioritize issues, design appropriate educational strategies to address these issues, evaluate these educational programs effectively, and utilize these evaluation results to redirect or refocus programs are paramount if Extension is to continue to be an effective informal educational agency. Therefore, continuous efforts must be taken to utilize current models, refine these models when appropriate, and develop new models that will enable Extension educators to address society's increasingly complex issues in the future through a systematic process enabling these educator to more effectively analyze issues and develop appropriate educational strategies that will result in measurable outcomes.

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