

Evaluating Extension Activities with Bennett's Hierarchy Evaluation Model

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Evaluation is an upfront activity in the design or planning phase of a program. Program evaluation is an essential organizational practice in agricultural extension activities. In a time of continued reduction in government funding, Extension professionals are challenged more than ever to document outcomes of programs and address stakeholder demands for accountability. Evaluation questions that address the “so what” issue are connected to outcomes and costs, and ultimately justify the value of Extension programs to public good.

Evidence of extension's effectiveness can help decision makers improve services to clientele. Without clear criteria, evidence of program accomplishments won't indicate the success of extension program. During the past three decades, the practice of evaluation has evolved as a discipline with new definitions, methods, approaches, and applications to diverse subjects and settings.

Bennett's hierarchy has been used for almost 35 years in Cooperative Extension. Educators continue to relate well to this hierarchy in evaluating their Extension programs. Extension specialists and program managers should use Bennett's hierarchy evaluation model when they conduct training/workshops relative to costs and benefits associated with evaluating an Extension program. The goal of this article is to discuss the importance of evaluation and to emphasize on using Bennett's hierarchy model in evaluating extension programs.

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