Putting knowledge to work is the business of the Cooperative Extension System. With a network of university-affiliated staff in more than 3000 counties across the country, Cooperative Extension plays a key role in focusing the resources of America’s land grant universities on local needs and issues. Because of this “grass roots” orientation, the accomplishments of Cooperative Extension are many and varied.

But Cooperative Extension’s most significant accomplishments are not the result of random actions and events. Rather, they are a product of the deliberate planning, disciplined implementation, and systematic evaluation of educational programs which meet the needs of local citizens.

Extension programs are created through a process called program development. Program development is defined as a deliberate process through which Extension engages representatives of the public in planning, implementing and evaluating plans of action for addressing needs and issues they have helped to identify.

Program development occurs at all levels of the Cooperative Extension System, however, the focus of this series of publications is on developing county-level programs in partnership with local citizens.

Kentucky Cooperative Extension uses a program development process made up of six distinct but interrelated phases. The six phases of the process are linked together in a circular pattern as depicted in the illustration on the following page.

Phases of the Process

The process begins with an organization’s efforts to develop linkages with the public. If Cooperative Extension is to remain a relevant force in addressing local needs, county Extension staff must build and maintain relationships with representatives of the community it is charged to serve. A strong County Extension Council is a critical part of these efforts to link the organization to the people.
Next, county Extension staff work in partnership with members of the County Extension Council to conduct a **situation analysis** that reveals needs and issues of public concern. Data collection techniques useful in situation analysis include community forums, focus groups, key informant interviews, media scans, and a review of existing data.

Then, the County Extension Council reviews the data that has been collected and generates a list of programming opportunities. **Priority setting** techniques are used to select those which should become targets of local Extension programs.

In the **program design** phase, a program plan is developed for each high priority program thrust. A program plan (or plan of work) specifies how purposefully selected learning experiences will produce a set of valued outcomes for an individual, group, or society.

Next, actions are carried out in accordance with the plans. In the **program implementation** phase, resources necessary for conducting the program are acquired and deployed. Volunteers are trained and mobilized. Learning experiences, activities, and other events are conducted.

The final phase of the cycle, **evaluation and accountability**, involves making judgments regarding the quality, value, or worth of a program and communicating those judgments to relevant decision makers. Such a commitment to accountability further strengthens Extension’s linkage to the people.

*Educational programs of the Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service serve all people regardless of race, color, age, sex, religion, disability, or national origin.*
Effective program development begins with building strong linkages with the public. Experience has shown that programs conceived, designed, and implemented solely by the paid staff of an organization are not likely to be effective. Furthermore, local citizens are more likely to support programs they help design. Consequently, local citizens must be involved in program development from the very beginning of the process.

Cooperative Extension typically utilizes both formal and informal mechanisms for building effective linkages with the public. Formal mechanisms include advisory boards, councils, and committees. Informal mechanisms include both strategic and unplanned interactions with members of the community that which occur on a day-to-day basis.

**Formal Mechanisms**

County Extension Agents interact with the citizens of their county on a daily basis. During these encounters, citizens frequently discuss the problems, issues, and needs of the community. Information gained through these interactions become part of an agent’s knowledge base about the community.

But information obtained through such informal means is seldom collected in a systematic manner. Consequently there are no assurances that the information collected about local needs and issues is representative of the entire community. So in addition to the informal mechanisms, some sort of formal structure is needed for systematically involving community members in the identification of local needs and issues.

Extension has long used advisory councils to build linkages with local citizens. Teitel (1994) defined advisory committees (councils), as "a group of volunteers that meets regularly on a long-term basis to provide advice and/or support to an institution or one of its sub-units." Or, as Thompson (1984) put it, advisory councils are a "bridge to the external public.” Today, many other organizations are now re-discovering advisory groups as vehicles for getting citizen input into strategic planning, policy development, and program design.
Extension agents are frequently asked to facilitate the program development discussions which occur at Extension advisory council meetings. The job of a facilitator is to provide a framework and process for interaction. Members of the group provide the content. An effective facilitator helps the group maintain a balance between risk and stagnation, between too much agreement and too much conflict, and between individual needs and the common good.

County Extension Councils

Each county in Kentucky is expected to have a functioning County Extension Council (CEC) that provides input regarding needs and issues that Cooperative Extension should address in that county. But the role of the CEC in programming does not end with providing input. Instead, County Extension Councils should be either directly or indirectly involved in all phases of the program development process.

Generally, the County Extension Council as a whole will play the lead role in processes leading up to the identification of local program priorities. Then, program development committees, task forces, and work groups frequently assume responsibility for the design, implementation, and evaluation of programs that address needs and issues that cut across program area boundaries. Extension program councils, such as the County 4-H Council, provide leadership to the design, implementation, and evaluation of programs that address needs and issues related to their respective domain of programming. The County Extension Council coordinates the work of all of these groups.

County Extension Councils are composed of between 15 and 40 citizens of the county who can adequately represent the needs and interests of both existing client groups and the citizenry as a whole. To be adequately representative, membership should be a broad-based, cross-section of the people of the county. Members should represent all demographic and geographic segments as well as government, education, business, and community organizations. Each Extension program area council should also be represented on the County Extension Council.

Each County Extension Council should routinely conduct a self-assessment of its composition to ensure that there is proper representation from the groups mentioned above. Members can be added at any time to obtain the proper representation or balance on the council.

Members should have a central interest in serving the needs of the county and be willing to share their perceptions, values, and beliefs for the common good of all residents. Ideally, members should represent a large number of actual or potential clientele and have something to share that will lead to better programs. Members should have skills that will help them function in a group setting. The Council’s constitution and by-laws should specify a process of naming members, a fixed term length for members and officers, and a rotation pattern that ensures that as members end their terms, they do so at staggered intervals.

It is important to realize that each County Extension Council is a dynamic, changing, social entity. As members are added, the dynamics of the group change. As the size of the group increases, so does its complexity. Consequently, Extension agents and council members alike must possess strong group process skills if the County Extension Council is to function properly throughout the program development process.
Program Area Advisory Councils or Committees

Each agent is expected to have a program area advisory council or committee to support their respective area of programming. These councils send representatives to the County Extension Council to ensure that each program area plays a role in addressing high priority needs and issues identified by the CEC. Representatives of program area councils also communicate needs and issues of the program area to the broader County Extension Council. Program area advisory councils operate by the same principles and philosophies mentioned above.

Informal Mechanisms

By living or working in the county they serve, county Extension agents develop a unique “feel” for the needs and wants of local citizens. They learn about the needs and issue of the community through routine contact with citizens. For example, trips to the local grocery store put Extension agents in contact with local citizens who will often stop to chat in the store aisles about their needs and issues. Agents may also learn about local issues and needs during visits they make to farms, homes, and schools. But sometimes agent interaction with citizens is more strategic in nature. For example, an Extension agent may seek membership in a particular community group or attend a community function for the sole purpose of building linkages with particular citizens or community leaders. Even a cup of coffee in a donut shop or fast food restaurant where community leaders congregate can serve as an excellent opportunity for strengthening linkages with the “movers and shakers” of the community. However, use of informal mechanisms should never be thought of as a substitute for having functioning advisory councils at the county level.

Multi-County, Regional, and State-Wide Programming

A cornerstone of Extension program development philosophy is the belief that programs are developed in accordance with local needs. However, many issues transcend county, district, regional, and even state boundaries. Consequently, multi-county, regional, state, and national programs are sometimes developed as a response to these common needs.

Counties with similar needs may choose to work together on their own accord to develop a programmatic response to a local need or issue. Such work across county lines is valued and encouraged. But a recent restructuring of Cooperative Extension within Kentucky provides additional support to such collaborative programming.

For programming purposes, Kentucky counties are assigned to one of three Extension regions. Regional Issues and Programming Committees (RIPCs) comprised of representatives of both field-based and on-campus personnel meet periodically throughout the year to discuss issues and needs identified by local County Extension Councils. County plans of work are an important mechanism for communicating these local needs and issues. Quick Response Teams then identify or develop resources that support programming focused on common needs and issues.

A State Extension Council helps establish state level program priorities and provides input on various policy, procedure, and resource issues.

Educational programs of the Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service serve all people regardless of race, color, age, sex, religion, disability, or national origin.
County Extension Councils are an important mechanism by which Cooperative Extension receives input regarding the program needs of a particular county. But can we be assured that all of the citizens providing input through these councils have complete information about the county in which they live? Not necessarily. Their knowledge may be limited to a particular area of interest or the part of the county in which they reside. As a result, the opinions they form regarding needed programs may sometimes be based on limited information.

So even when a County Extension Council appears to be broadly representative of the local population, it is possible that program priorities established by such a group can sometimes fail to target important issues. One way to combat that problem is to involve members of the County Extension Council in conducting what is called a situation analysis.

Situation analysis is defined as an examination of a community for the purpose of identifying issues, problems, and opportunities which might be addressed through Extension programming. There are three major sources of information useful in conducting a situation analysis. The first is data that been collected by someone else. This is typically called secondary or existing data. The second is resident perspectives about issues, problems, and opportunities. The third information source is current research and knowledge which may have implications for county programming.
Situation analysis begins with a meeting of the County Extension Council where members make plans for collecting situational data from these three sources. Council members and Extension staff can help with the collection of data. A second meeting of the council is then held to review the data and discuss the implications of the findings. The product of this discussion is a list of program opportunities which may merit Extension’s involvement. (Specific facilitation techniques which may be used for generating a list of program opportunities can be found in the next publication in this series on priority setting.)

Existing Data

Data that has already been collected by another organization or agency is frequently referred to as “secondary” or “existing” data. Such data can be obtained from a variety of sources. In Kentucky, two key sources are the Kentucky State Data Center and Cooperative Extension’s *Kentucky: By The Numbers*. In addition, many public agencies and non-profit organizations produce collections of data related to their area of interest. A few web sites with conveniently available data include the following:

- Kentucky State Data Center: [http://ksdc.louisville.edu](http://ksdc.louisville.edu)
- Kentucky: By the Numbers: [http://www.ca.uky.edu/snarl/](http://www.ca.uky.edu/snarl/)
- Extension HEEL Project Data: [http://www.ca.uky.edu/heel/](http://www.ca.uky.edu/heel/)
- U. S. Census Bureau Quick Facts: [http://quickfacts.census.gov](http://quickfacts.census.gov)

For additional guidance on finding and using existing data, see *Finding Data on the Internet* and *What Counts? Measuring Jobs, Income, and Unemployment* available at:

- Kentucky: By the Numbers Publications: [http://www.ca.uky.edu/snarl/KYByTheNumbers/Publications/KYBTNPublications.htm](http://www.ca.uky.edu/snarl/KYByTheNumbers/Publications/KYBTNPublications.htm)

Local chambers of commerce, boards of education, county health departments, local libraries, police departments, and other local agencies can provide additional information useful in determining the local situation. Often, other agencies have conducted their own situation analysis and are willing to share their findings.

Ideally, members of the County Extension Council should take responsibility for gathering data about the county. Some members may have access to data that Extension staff would have difficulty acquiring. One member may volunteer to gather economic data. Another may choose to gather data about children and families. Other areas to explore include education, environment, health, housing, agriculture, population trends, development, and tourism.
Resident Perspectives

In addition to examining existing data, the County Extension Council should also engage in activities which help them understand the challenges and opportunities facing the community from a resident perspective. Gathering resident perspectives begins with determining what questions should be asked.

Michael Lambur of Virginia Tech presents the following list of questions (adapted from Samuels, 1996) as a starting point for determining what to ask residents.

- What are the positive and negative characteristics of the community?
- What are the most pressing issues and problems confronting residents?
- What strengths and resources reside within the community for addressing these issues and problems?
- What barriers prevent residents from addressing these issues and problems?
- How can Extension help address the issues and problems through educational programming?

There are several simple methods for gathering resident perspectives. A few of these are discussed briefly in the sections which follow.

Community Forums – Community forums are public meetings in which a large number of individuals share and discuss their perspectives on issues facing the community. While the primary purpose is to stimulate discussion about local problems and issues they also create awareness of Cooperative Extension. Although such forums are usually open to the public, elected officials, agency representatives, and community leaders often receive special invitations to participate. Issues forums should be facilitated by a member of the County Extension Council. The agenda might include an overview of the existing data collected in the previous step, a discussion of some of the core questions listed above, and perhaps an overview of current programming that is being implemented to address local needs.

Focus Group Interviews – A focus group interview is a structured discussion with a small group of eight to twelve individuals on a clearly defined topic. Members selected to participate typically share some common characteristic such as age, gender, or role in the community. The moderator has the responsibility of asking questions and managing the ensuing dialogue. A recorder takes notes or sometimes tape records the session for later coding and analysis. To learn how to conduct a focus group interview refer to “Using Focus Groups in Program Development and Evaluation” available at http://www.ca.uky.edu/Agpsd/focus.pdf

Key Informant Interviews - In any community, there are a number of individuals who, because of their unique position within the community, can provide important information about local issues and needs. For example, an operator of a farm supply store might be able to provide important information regarding fertilizer sales. A school principal might be of assistance in identifying some of the needs of young people in the community. A face-to-face interview is the most commonly used method of collecting information from key informants. After key informants are identified, an appointment is made to conduct the interview. During the interview, the key informant responds to a predetermined set of questions related to community needs and assets. Interviews may be conducted by either Extension staff or members of the County Extension Council.
Surveys – Surveys are cost effective way of gathering data from a large number of people. In general, community members are asked to respond individually to a set of questions about their community. Some surveys are conducted orally, either face-to-face or over the phone. More typically, a printed questionnaire is mailed to community members or administered in a group setting. Survey questions can be either closed-ended (where respondents choose from a list of possible responses) or open-ended (where respondents are free to develop their own response). Again, the questions listed at the beginning of this section can guide the process of survey development. Some surveys also ask the respondents to provide selected demographic information so that generalizations can be made about how specific groups of individuals view a particular situation.

Media Scan - Another method for gathering information about resident perspectives is to systematically review the content of news articles and editorials appearing in local newspapers and on local radio and television stations. These are often excellent sources of information regarding the issues people are concerned about locally.

Current Research and Knowledge

While a core principle of Extension programming is an emphasis on local program determination, it is also important to acknowledge the role of current research and knowledge in setting program priorities. While some would argue that basing local programs on what researchers say would be “good for people” is too “top down” in nature, citizens are often unaware of new discoveries that have the potential to improve their lives. Consequently, one could also argue that it is Extension's responsibility to inform people of such discoveries and deliver programs which harness the benefits of those discoveries.

An examination of history will reveal that Extension has long relied upon research to inform its selection of program priorities. For years, Extension has helped farmers learn about agricultural research findings that improve profit or yield. Extension has also played a leading role in helping citizens consume diets which subscribe to research-based dietary guidelines. While such programming did not necessarily arise from a formally articulated local need, the benefits of such programming are seldom questioned.

In keeping with this need to disseminate new information, university-based Extension specialists periodically provide county Extension staff with updates on research, legislation, and policies which may affect local programming. Agents may choose to share this information with members of local advisory councils as they engage in the process of situational analysis.

A Final Word

The data collection procedures described above will provide County Extension Council members with a wealth of information for making informed decisions about Extension programming. It is possible, however, that each member of the Council will interpret the data differently. Skilled facilitation is now required to build consensus regarding the future program thrusts.
Just as it is important for the County Extension Council to link Cooperative Extension programming efforts to needs identification and situation analysis, it is equally important for the council to be involved in deciding which needs and issues will be addressed. At this point, the County Extension Council members, program leaders, and staff have been engaged in gathering information and data related to the county and the needs and wants of local citizens. Agents have worked with University faculty in identifying research, legislation, and policies which have implications for programming. Council members and agents have gathered information about the county from citizens and existing data sources.

Now the question becomes, “What do we do with all this information?” How do we share the data with the council? There are many more needs identified and program opportunities than can be addressed, so prioritization is essential.

This fact sheet will provide ideas for presenting data to the County Extension Council and describe tools which can be used in setting priorities.

PRESENTING THE DATA

Both the County Extension Agents and members of the County Extension Council should be involved in gathering data to provide an accurate picture of the county and its relationship to counties of similar population and demographic characteristics. Providing information which shows rankings within the state and nation helps clarify the needs and issues locally.

All information gathered should be presented in an unbiased, straightforward and accurate manner. Individuals selected to present data should try to avoid letting personal biases, values, and beliefs interfere with presenting an accurate picture of the county. Even when such biases are present, a County Extension Council that reflects diversity in the backgrounds and experiences of its members helps assure a balanced interpretation of the local situation.
Charts and Graphs:

Pictures can tell a story. For many, the graphic presentation of numbers will more clearly communicate a need or issue. Use computer programs such as, Microsoft Excel, SPSS, or other software programs, to develop charts and graphs which make the data more easily understood. These may be presented using a computer program such as PowerPoint, by creating an actual poster with graphs and charts, or by printing and distributing handouts with graphs and charts.

Meet with County Extension Council members who have gathered data from various sources and decide how the data could be presented most effectively. If necessary the Extension office may need to produce the charts and graphs from the data provided by the Council members.

Quiz Formats:

Simple multiple-choice or true-false questions can also be used as teaching tools. If you write the questions and use related information as the alternatives in multiple-choice questions, it will provide a guide for presenting the data and making it more relevant. For example:

What percent of the families in our county are below the poverty level?
A. 12%
B. 16%
C. 17%
D. 23%

Answer: For this county the correct answer is “C.” Alternative “A” represents the US poverty level; “B” represents the State; and, “D” represents a neighboring county.

Thus, a discussion of the all alternatives would provide a clearer picture of the ranking of this county with respect to related entities.

Game Formats:

We have all played Trivial Pursuit or Jeopardy and learned a lot in the process. By creating your own game, one based on a television show or a commercial game, you can share data and also have fun in the process. Other games which work well are Hollywood Squares (Tic Tac Toe) or Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?

Dividing the participants into groups and letting them identify answers creates a more supportive environment where individuals participate as teams. Having simple, inexpensive prizes for winning teams can add to the fun for everyone.

MOVING FROM RAW DATA TO PROGRAM OPPORTUNITIES

The next logical question is, “What does all this data mean?” Now the task is to move from raw data to a meaningful grouping of needs and issues. In many ways, gathering
data is the easy part. Putting it in a context and giving a name to the issues and needs of the county is more difficult and challenging.

The process of identifying program opportunities begins with the County Extension Council identifying the local needs and opportunities for programs based on the data presented and accompanying discussions. (See Figure 1) Once the list of needs and program opportunities has been generated, priorities must be set to provide parameters for a meaningful yet doable plan which focuses on major program thrusts. Criteria established by the CEC and Extension staff will guide the decision-making process.

Brainstorming

The most frequently used technique for generating a list of ideas is Brainstorming. (For more information see Brainstorming fact sheet: http://www.ca.uky.edu/agpsd/brainsto.pdf) Because the County Extension Council is “armed” with information collected through the situation analysis, brainstorming is likely to produce a highly relevant list of program ideas. Facilitated correctly, brainstorming will involve all members of the group, even those reluctant to speak at public meetings.

Guidelines for Conducting the Brainstorming Activity

1. Clearly frame an open-ended question. For example, From the data which has been presented to the Council, what are the educational needs for this county?

2. Do not censure or make judgments about any ideas. The goal is to generate as many ideas as possible. Do not comment on any ideas at this time.

3. List all ideas generated on a flip chart. Have one or two persons writing ideas as quickly as possible as they are shared. (Tip: When the page is three-fourths full, start a new page. It encourages the group to continue generating ideas.)

4. Encourage hitchhiking. Encourage people to add ideas that build or are generated by someone else’s suggestions.

5. Focus on quantity. The more ideas the better. Often the best suggestions come in the last few minutes of a brainstorming activity.

6. Stay loose. Keep the environment free and supportive. Do not force people to participate.
In large groups it is often difficult to get everyone present to speak out or share their thoughts with others. The following modification of the brainstorming activity will create a smaller and more supportive environment which will solicit input from all participants.

**Modified Brainstorming Activity Utilizing Small Groups**

1. **Divide the participants into small groups.** Groups of 5-7 are optimal.

2. **Begin with silent generation of ideas.** Individuals first work independently to generate their own list of program ideas. The facilitator instructs them to write the three ideas they feel most strongly about on half-sheets of paper (5 ½ X 8 ½) using a felt-tip marking pen. Use a separate sheet of paper for each idea.

3. **Share ideas.** Each individual shares one idea with the small group in round-robin fashion until all ideas are shared.

4. **Discuss and clarify.** Within the small group, discuss and clarify all ideas, allowing participants to explain further the idea they shared. Remove duplications and cluster related ideas under a new heading.

5. **Select ideas to share with larger group.** Each small group selects three or four ideas that all members of the small group can support as programming priorities.

6. **Present ideas to larger group.** Ideas from small groups are presented in round-robin fashion to the larger group. Groups place their ideas (the original sheet of paper the idea was written on or the new heading for clustered ideas) on a “sticky wall.” (The “sticky wall” is a sheet of nylon fabric approximately 4’ by 8’ that has been sprayed with adhesive. Paper will then adhere to the fabric, but can be removed or moved with ease. Instead of nylon, rolled paper of similar dimensions may be used.)

7. **Ideas are discussed and clarified within the larger group.** Duplications are removed. Related ideas can be clustered under a new heading and treated as a single programming thrust. What remains is a list of program opportunities derived from the collective wisdom of the group.

The resulting list comprises locally identified needs or issues we call Program Opportunities (See Figure 1.) However, this list is generally quite long and may have many more program ideas than the county can address at this time. Program priorities must be set to realistically lead to a significant impact. The selection of program priorities is guided by criteria.
CRITERIA

The process of setting priorities begins with the examination of each identified need in light of a set of criteria that helps to determine either the magnitude of the issue or the prospects for making a difference with the issue. Some of the ideas generated from the Brainstorming activity may be more relevant to Extension’s educational mission than others. Thus, criteria must be developed to serve as a guide for setting priorities.

These criteria can include:

- The relative importance of the issue.
- The number of people affected.
- Political environment.
- History, i.e., Has this been addressed in the past? Are there implications from other programs?
- Ability of Extension to respond.
- Interests of County Extension Council members.
- Culture of the county and communities.
- Efforts of other organizations and agencies.

In light of these criteria, some programming opportunities are more compelling than others. When individual council members apply the criteria, they will not come to the same conclusions regarding the priority of program ideas. Fortunately, there are several methods which can be used to set priorities that still allow every voice to be heard as the group makes decisions regarding high priority programming opportunities.

SETTING PRIORITIES

Since we can’t do everything, it is important to engage in a process to determine the program opportunities which are the highest priorities for your county. With the criteria in mind the group engages in a process for determining program priorities they feel Extension should focus on during the next four years. Once decided, they become County Major Areas of Programming (C-MAPS). (See Figure 1.)

By design Brainstorming generates a long list of ideas. Even after applying the criteria there are more program opportunities than can be addressed in one plan of work. Several methods of voting are described below which help groups narrow long lists into a prioritized grouping that guide the development of C-MAPS.

Simple Voting – Each member votes for the one item on the list they feel is the highest priority. After everyone has voted the votes are counted and the items with the most votes are designated as highest priority.

Multi-Voting – In this activity participants are allowed to vote for as many items as they wish. They may vote using a show of hands or colored dots or stars. Votes for each item are totaled and all items receiving votes from half the people voting are included in the next round. (Example: If 20 people vote, items receiving 10 votes are in the
next round.) Everyone votes again. Each person is allowed to cast votes equal to half the number of items on the list. Repeat until there are six to ten items on the list. Discuss remaining ideas and selecting top priorities. (For more information see, Multivoting fact sheet: http://www.ca.uky.edu/agpsd/multivot.pdf)

100 Votes – Sometimes called Weighted Voting, each participant is given the opportunity to cast multiple votes, in this activity it is 100 votes. The participants allocate their votes to the items they feel should have the highest priority. For example, there may be 5 items they feel are priorities. They then write the number of votes beside the items, i.e., 35 beside the two they feel strongest about and 10 beside the other three or some other combination totaling 100 votes. If they wish they may cast all 100 votes for one program idea. All votes are totaled and the group discusses the items and ranking determined by the voting. Group determines the cut off for priority programs. (For more information see, 100 Votes fact sheet: http://www.ca.uky.edu/agpsd/100votes.pdf)

Nominal Group Technique\(^1\) - This technique begins with silent brainstorming to generate program ideas. In round-robin fashion, each participant shares an idea until their list is depleted. Discuss all ideas. Share pros and cons. Similar ideas are grouped. Each member is then asked to rank order their top ten ideas, with ten being the highest ranking. This may be done directly on the flip chart sheet listing the ideas or on a 3 X 5 card. Rankings are totaled and ideas are ranked with the one receiving the highest total being the highest ranked. You may want to record the number of people who ranked each of the items. Discuss rankings and determine program priorities. (For more information see, Nominal Group Technique fact sheet: http://www.ca.uky.edu/agpsd/nominal.pdf)

COUNTY MAJOR AREAS OF PROGRAMMING

Once the priorities have been established, the Extension staff will have directions regarding the focus of future Extension programs. These high priority program thrusts are referred to as Major Areas of Programming or MAPs. Each county is expected to identify between five and eight MAPs. The number varies depending on such things as staff size and the scope of the MAPs identified.

In some cases counties may group one or more program thrusts identified by the County Extension Council into a single MAP. Conversely if the program thrusts are broad, it might be advisable to identify two MAPs which will address the broader program need. When the final list of county MAPs is created, local citizens should be able to clearly see how Extension programs are addressing the priorities they helped identify.

MAPs help Extension staff organize their work into manageable pieces. They typically encompass all the work directed toward the achievement of one or more long-term

outcomes. In addition, the name or title assigned to each MAP will provide a useful framework for communicating with external audiences.

Thus when “naming” the C-MAP consider the following questions:

- Does the name communicate an intended action?
- Does the name have appeal to external stakeholders?
- Does the name accurately reflect the scope of programming included in the thrust?
- Is the name concise, meaningful and free from jargon?

Examples of C-MAP titles that meet these criteria are, *Better Health Through Better Diets*, or *Increasing Farm Profits Through Diversification*.

**MAKING A PUBLIC COMMITMENT TO ACTION**

Making the general public aware of the overall Extension program is the responsibility of all Extension staff. Sometimes the public has relatively little information about the broad program directions guiding educational activities. Therefore, once the list of MAPs is finalized, it becomes important to publicly announce the new directions for Extension programs. Feature articles in local newspapers, direct mail flyers, or special editions of newsletters can all be used announce the new program thrusts. Additionally, when reports are developed to highlight Extension’s accomplishments, organize the report around the county’s major areas of programming. These five to eight program thrusts become the Extension “sound bite” to communicate local needs and issues being addressed for the next four years.

Once again this is an appropriate place to further engage the County Extension Council in communicating major thrusts and building public support for program goals. The more diverse the CEC membership, the better able we are to offer relevant programs, promote and insure participation and gain new partners for comprehensive educational efforts.
Program Design

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Situation analysis helps Cooperative Extension identify issues of broad public concern which might become targets of Extension programming. Priority setting activities then help Extension professionals determine which of these public concerns most deserve Extension’s attention. Then, once the focus of Extension’s work is determined, programs are developed which address those identified concerns. That phase of the program development process is called program design. A program plan is developed for each resulting program.

A well designed program will result in significant and lasting changes in people and the conditions in which they live. Consequently, a program is defined as a sequence of intentional actions and events organized in a manner that they result in valued outcomes for a clearly defined audience.

There are several key words and phrases in that definition which merit further discussion. First, viewing a program as a sequence of actions and events suggests that a single activity, learning experience, or publication by itself is not likely to produce the type of significant and lasting changes described above. Second, the definition suggests that actions and events are intentional in nature. They are selected because of their utility in producing desired outcomes. Third, the term valued suggests that some group of individuals has made a judgment regarding the outcomes the program intends to bring about. Finally, the definition suggests that the designers of the program should be able to clearly articulate the audience the program targets.

MAPs and Program Plans

Situation analysis and priority setting yield a set of high priority program thrusts called Major Areas of Programming or MAPs. MAPs are useful for communicating the nature of Extension’s work to external stakeholders. But the scope of work included in a single MAP is frequently too broad to be represented by a single program plan. Instead, several program plans may be developed for a single MAP. For example, a county with five MAPs may develop more than five program plans. There is not a one-to-one correlation between MAPs and program plans. The diagram at the top of the next page shows the relationship between MAPs and program plans.
Design Teams

The County Extension Council (CEC) plays a major role in both situation analysis and priority setting. While the CEC may help to identify critical areas where programming is needed, it may not be practical to involve the full Council in developing detailed program plans. This is best left to a smaller group called a design team.

Some design teams are existing advisory councils. For example, the 4-H Council may develop the program plan for a specific youth issue. But other times it may be beneficial to create a new planning group that cuts across program areas and brings in new program partners.

A typical design team might include interested agents, council members, other Extension volunteers, local citizens, and representatives of collaborating organizations or agencies. While specific composition will vary by program, the design team should always involve more than just Extension staff.

The Logic of Programs

Embodied in the definition of a program is the notion of a logical “if-then” relationship between actions and outcomes. The rationale for why specific actions should produce desired outcomes is called the program theory. Program theory explains why the things we do should produce the results we intend.

Seldom, though, can a program theory be expressed as a simple two-element “if-then” relationship between actions and outcomes. More often, program theory is expressed as a chain of “if-then” relationships somewhat analogous to a chain of dominos standing on end. When one domino falls, it causes the next to fall and so on.
For a program on healthy eating, a more complete program theory would suggest that if the appropriate learning experiences are provided, then participants will experience a change in attitudes regarding the importance of healthy eating. It could be argued that such changes in attitudes are requisite to a change in eating behavior. If participants eat healthier foods, then they are likely to experience better health.

Many program theories are implicit. In other words, they exist only in the mind of the programmer. They are not communicated to others in any way. But, more and more, programmers create diagrams or charts to communicate the theory behind a program they are planning. These diagrams and charts are typically called logic models.

Logic Models

Simply stated, a logic model is a picture of how a program is supposed to operate. Logic models specify the chain of actions, events, or outcomes that a program intends to set in motion. The relationships between elements in the chain are presented as “if-then” relationships. We make assertions about these relationships based on research, experience, intuition, and other sources of knowledge. Logic models help make the theory behind a program explicit.

Some logic models are simple linear chains. Others are more complex and systems-oriented. While there is no prescribed formula for how a finished model should look, the benefits of using logic models in program development are clear and compelling.

Benefits of Logic Models

The W. K. Kellogg Foundation (2001) cites several benefits of using logic models in program development. First, logic models are instrumental in program development. They serve as a guide for program planning, a blueprint for implementation, and a framework for evaluation. Second, logic models can help us communicate our plans to others who may be contemplating an initial or continuing investment in that program. Third, logic models reflect a shared understanding of a program which results from facilitated dialogue among members of the design team. Finally, logic models serve as diagnostic tools to help us figure out why programs are not working as planned.

Basic Elements of Logic Models

Logic models are composed of inputs, outputs, and outcomes. Inputs support organizational outputs which, in turn, lead to valued outcomes.
**Inputs** are the resources needed to conduct a program. Inputs include such things as time, money, paid staff, volunteers, materials, facilities, equipment, and the efforts of partners. Inputs are the costs of conducting a program.

**Outputs** are the things that an organization does with the inputs it commits to a program. Outputs are the specific actions taken by the organization in response to an identified need or issue.

**Outcomes** can be defined as the state of affairs which exists after a program is conducted. For the purpose of this publication, the term outcome is synonymous with the term results.

**More About Outputs**

Many logic models further define outputs by specifying both the nature of the organization’s *activities* and the *audience* for which they are intended.

In Extension, *activities* are typically learning experiences provided to an audience we intend to reach. They include such things as workshops, field days, demonstrations, camps, training schools, newsletters, home visits, and a wide array of other learning experiences.

The activities, or things that the organization does, are usually directed toward a particular *audience*. To be effective, logic models should clearly define the audience to be served by the program. The audience to be served influences both the content to be offered and the nature of the learning experience provided.

**Types of Outcomes**

In an attempt to strengthen program development activities among affiliated organizations, The United Way of America (1996) has developed a three-tiered framework for thinking about outcomes. Their model identifies initial, intermediate, and long-term outcomes.
They suggest that **initial outcomes** are the first benefits or changes that a participant experiences. Initial outcomes are typically changes in a participant’s knowledge, opinions, skills or aspirations related to a particular topic. The acronym **KOSA** can be used to refer to these four types of initial outcomes (knowledge, attitudes, skills, and aspirations).

**Intermediate outcomes** are defined as changes in participant **practices** or **behaviors**. Intermediate outcomes link initial outcomes to more distant results.

**Long-term outcomes** tend to be the ultimate benefits that a program aims to produce. Most long-term outcomes can be categorized as being social, economic, or environmental in nature. The acronym **SEEC** has been developed to refer to collectively to long-term changes in social, economic, or environmental conditions. Long-term outcomes can affect the participants themselves, other people, a community, or society in general.

It is important to point out that the “if-then” relationships discussed earlier also serve to link various types of outcomes together in a logical sequence. For example, program participants must become aware of a better way of doing something before they can be expected to change their behavior. If they actually change their behavior, then, social, economic, or environmental benefits can be expected to result from that action.

**Putting It All Together**

The illustration below incorporates all of the basic elements into a single diagram. At the far left, the model shows how inputs support the implementation of program activities. The activities which are conducted attract program participants which have certain characteristics. Through their involvement with the program, those participants gain knowledge, acquire skills, change their opinions, or aspire to change their behaviors. What participants learn is seen as instrumental in supporting changes in behaviors or practices. Such actions, in turn, produce changes in social, economic, or environmental conditions (on the far right).

As the program is implemented, events depicted in the logic model occur from left to right. But program planning begins on the right side of the model. The process of designing a program using a logic model framework can be seen as generating answers to a series of questions, with each question related to one of the basic elements of the logic model.
Here is a series of questions which may be asked of a design team during the process of building a program logic model.

- What changes in **social, economic, or environmental conditions** will the program produce? That is, what are the long-term outcomes of our program?

- If such changes in conditions are to be realized, what must people do differently in terms of **practices** or **behaviors**?

- If people are to change their behaviors or practices, what must they **know**? What **skills** must they possess? How must their **attitudes** or **opinions** change? What must they **aspire to**? Be as specific as possible when identifying desired **KOSA** changes.

- Who is the audience that the program is intending to reach? What are the characteristics of the intended **audience**? (There may be more than one target audience.)

- What **activities** or learning experiences will be most effective in producing the outcomes desired for each target audience?

- What **resources** are required to implement the learning experiences planned?

Once these questions are answered, the design team is ready to put their logic model on paper. Sometimes design teams will develop answers to these questions on separate sheets of flip chart paper and tape them to a wall to represent the program’s logic model. Following the meeting, one or two members condense the logic model into a form more suitable for sharing with others. The worksheet included in this publication can be used for this purpose. This condensed logic model can then be entered into the program planning templates found in CATPAWS.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inputs</th>
<th>Outputs</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Activities</td>
<td>Audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources deployed to address situation</td>
<td>Activities supported by resources invested</td>
<td>Individuals or groups who participate in the activities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Contextual Factors**
The fifth topic in the program development series is program implementation. After needs are identified and program priorities are established, it is now time to implement the plans. For some it might be useful to look at the previous phases as developing a game plan for an athletic team. Just like pre-game preparation, they represent the time and effort that precedes “playing the game”. Program implementation is putting the game plan to work on the field.

To this point the county staff, County Extension Council members and other citizens of the county have been involved in conducting a detailed situational analysis for the county. They have identified areas of need, program focus and set program priorities. Agents and council members have developed a plan of work with program logic models to guide their work the next four years. It is important to note that County Extension Council members have remained engaged with the program development process throughout every stage of development. Because of their extensive involvement they feel ownership of the program and will want to be involved in the implementation phase. CEC members may have particular interests and investments in the various C-MAP activities of the Plan of Work and desire to be more involved in those than others. In addition leaders and other professionals not on the Council may want to be involved in implementing the program.

As you develop your “game plan” for each C-MAP, consider these four elements in the program implementation phase: resource development, program management, marketing and collaboration.

**Resource Development** – For each program the available resources need to be assessed and a plan put into place to mobilize those resources or assets. This is one of the most important aspects of planning. Often we under utilize our resources by simply asking “How much money do I have to spend?” Begin by asking a series of questions: “What do I need to get the job done, what are the local assets to get the job done, what are the external resources I need to tap into (University as well as other external resources) and how can I mobilize those to enhance Extension’s efforts?”

Not utilizing all available resources in an appropriate manner results in ineffective programs that do not produce desired outcomes. Spending big money on poorly thought out support materials such as flashy, glitzy handouts or videos without any substantive educational value or information not pertinent to the audience will not produce desired results and will reflect poorly on you as a professional.
Resources are also people, places, knowledge, and things that can be mobilized to make our programs produce the desired outcomes. The available resources vary from community to community. Some of the most effective Extension programs have been conducted in limited resource counties where agents have effectively utilized talents of volunteers, resources of other agencies and capitalized on the assets of their communities. According to Beau Beaulieu, Southern Rural Development Center at Mississippi State University, it's all about “targeting resources to help resolve local problems deemed to be of critical importance to the welfare of the community.”

**Program Management** - The activities and processes involved in the management of a program can be divided into four categories; human management, task management; fiscal management and risk management.

*Human Management:* The number of people needed to carry out program activities can vary from a very few to many volunteers. The people or human management component of program management is essential to effective program implementation and requires extensive planning and preparation. However, involving many people in the program leads to a greater impact and an expanded outreach for CES programs. If Extension programs are to effectively involve volunteers, a thorough understanding of the GEMS model of volunteer leadership will provide a comprehensive framework for program implementation. For more information on the GEMS model visit the following web site. [http://www.ca.uky.edu/agcollege/4H/gems/](http://www.ca.uky.edu/agcollege/4H/gems/)

*Task Management:* This category of program management refers to the processes involved in actually doing everything you planned to do in the program. Adhering to the time line, meeting due dates for proposals, conducting educational programs and creating supportive educational environments are a part of program implementation. Knowledge and skills in educational theory and methodology, meeting management and organization and planning are essential.

*Fiscal Management:* The third category of program implementation is the management of fiscal resources. These will vary from program to program. Some may be funded through a grant or gift. Others may be a part of the county budget for Extension programs. In all cases, financial accountability is essential. Follow the guidelines in the County Extension Office Procedure Manual for utilizing financial resources. [http://www.ca.uky.edu/internal/Office%20Manual/office%20manual.htm](http://www.ca.uky.edu/internal/Office%20Manual/office%20manual.htm)

*Risk Management:* The management of risk is an important category for staff to consider when implementing Extension programs. Every precaution should be taken to provide a safe environment for participants, volunteers and colleagues. Youth protection standards and risk management strategies should be strictly adhered to. For information regarding the Kentucky guidelines and strategies see: [http://www.ca.uky.edu/agcollege/4h/youthprotection/index.htm](http://www.ca.uky.edu/agcollege/4h/youthprotection/index.htm).

Volunteer insurance is a service of the Kentucky Commission on Community Volunteerism and Service. The insurance, through the Corporate Insurance Management Association (CIMA), is available in three ways and provides coverage from July 1 through June 30, annually, but is available for purchase throughout the year.
Marketing - Marketing is creating an awareness of the organization and its programs. Marketing is not something extra and additional to normal programming. Rather, 
**marketing is normal programming.** The way in which we deliver educational programs can add to the positive image we want people to have of the Cooperative Extension Service. When planning educational programming, it is important to think in advance about “getting the word out”, publicity, usage of names/logos and web-site resources.

In planning any program, it is recommended that a timeline and goals be established in order to meet program expectations. Be sure to build in enough time to advertise the educational event(s) to clientele, the public and appropriate key decision-makers. Mail-outs, electronic delivery, county web-site, display boards, community room postings and media outlets, etc. are all important sources for delivering programming announcements. It is important to use the recommended guidelines and templates for marketing Extension programs. These resources are found on the College of Agriculture, Internal Site Index, “Publishing and Marketing Resources” website: [http://www.ca.uky.edu/agc/sections/pubrel/resources/resources.htm](http://www.ca.uky.edu/agc/sections/pubrel/resources/resources.htm)

All printed materials, exhibits, news releases, etc., prepared and used for the public should contain the proper names marketing logos for consistency. With new technology and resources available, we need to make every effort to have professionally prepared and designed materials using the logos and marketing ideas. Remember, forethought and consideration should be given to portray a professional image **both in content and appearance** in regards to programming.

Collaboration – Working with other agencies, organizations and groups is a part of the Extension philosophy. Whether coordinating a health fair or serving on an economic development coalition, Extension seeks to bring people together and link resources. The National Network for Collaboration defines collaboration as a process of **participation through which people, groups, and organizations work together to achieve desired results.**[^1] ([http://crs.uvm.edu/nnco/collab/framework.html](http://crs.uvm.edu/nnco/collab/framework.html)) Extension professionals engage in many levels of relationships represented in the following five levels: networking, cooperation, coordination, coalitions, and collaboration. Each level involves a slightly different purpose, structure and process for working together. In every level, people come together because of some commonality, some relationship that is perceived as beneficial to each groups’ purpose or vision. Figure 1, at the end of this publication, illustrates the differences in the purpose and degree of commitment of each level in working together. As you see many of our networks are causal, providing resources with very little personal commitment. Whereas, collaboration is a long-term commitment with shared visions and the development of interdependent systems to address issues and needs.

Program implementation often involves creating the linkages with other individuals, organizations or agencies to more effectively and efficiently address the identified need. However, it should be noted that not all major areas of programming will have local groups interested in addressing the need. For more information on collaboration see the National Network for Collaboration web site. (http://crs.uvm.edu/nnco/)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Networking</td>
<td>* Dialog and common understanding</td>
<td>* Loose/ flexible link</td>
<td>* Low key leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Clearinghouse for information</td>
<td>* Roles loosely defined</td>
<td>* Minimal decision making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Create base of support</td>
<td>* Community action is primary link among members</td>
<td>* Little conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation or Alliance</td>
<td>* Match needs and provide coordination</td>
<td>* Central body of people as communication hub</td>
<td>* Facilitative leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Limit duplication of services</td>
<td>* Semi-formal links</td>
<td>* Complex decision making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Ensure tasks are done</td>
<td>* Roles somewhat defined</td>
<td>* Some conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>* Links are advisory</td>
<td>* Formal communications within the central group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>* Group leverages/raises money</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordination or Partnership</td>
<td>* Share resources to address common issues</td>
<td>* Central body of people consists of decision makers</td>
<td>* Autonomous leadership but focus in on issue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Merge resource base to create something new</td>
<td>* Roles defined</td>
<td>* Group decision making in central and subgroups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>* Links formalized</td>
<td>* Communication is frequent and clear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>* Group develops new resources and joint budget</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coalition</td>
<td>* Share ideas and be willing to pull resources from existing systems</td>
<td>* All members involved in decision making</td>
<td>* Shared leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Develop commitment for a minimum of three years</td>
<td>* Roles and time defined</td>
<td>* Decision making formal with all members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>* Links formal with written agreement</td>
<td>* Communication is common and prioritized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>* Group develops new resources and joint budget</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>* Accomplish shared vision and impact benchmarks</td>
<td>* Consensus used in shared decision making</td>
<td>* Leadership high, trust level high, productivity high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Build interdependent system to address issues and opportunities</td>
<td>* Roles, time and evaluation formalized</td>
<td>* Ideas and decisions equally shared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>* Links are formal and written in work assignments</td>
<td>* Highly developed communication</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Community Based Collaborations- Wellness Multiplied 1994, Teresa Hogue, Oregon Center for Community Leadership

Educational programs of Kentucky Cooperative Extension serve all people regardless of race, color, age, sex, religion, disability, or national origin. University of Kentucky, Kentucky State University, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Kentucky Counties, cooperating.
Evaluation can be described as a systematic process for judging the value or worth of something (Worthen, Sanders, and Fitzpatrick, 1997). In general, evaluation involves establishing criteria, collecting evidence, and making a judgment. A specific type of evaluation called program evaluation focuses on assessing either the quality and/or effectiveness of a program.

Earlier in this series of publications we defined a program as a sequence of intentional actions and events organized in a manner that they result in valued outcomes for a clearly defined audience. Program evaluation can focus either on the actions and events which comprise the program or the outcomes they produce.

Process versus Outcome Evaluation

As we expand our understanding of evaluation, it is important to make a distinction between two broad types of evaluation. One type of evaluation focuses on evaluating how the program was implemented. The other focuses on documenting the results. These two types of evaluation are discussed in more detail below.

- **Process Evaluation** focuses on how the program was implemented. It often provides us with important information about how the program might be improved. For example, we may want to know if the learning experiences provided were appropriate for the target audience. If not, what changes are needed to make them more appropriate? Process evaluation helps answer those questions. Process evaluation can be a catalyst for continual learning and growth.

- **Outcome Evaluation** focuses on documenting program results. Outcome evaluation helps us determine how individuals, groups, and communities are different as a result of what we did. It examines the change that our efforts produced. Criteria for outcome evaluation are often embedded in the outcome statements found in a program’s logic model. The initial, intermediate, and long-term outcomes define what success looks like.
Recent attention to documenting program results has caused some people to view outcome evaluation as being more valuable than process evaluation. Many stakeholders want or need information produced by process evaluation. For example, a parent contemplating sending a child to summer camp may want to know about youth-counselor ratios, the quality of facilities, or the reactions of previous campers to the program. Such information is produced primarily by process evaluation.

Neither process evaluation nor outcome evaluation is more desirable than the other. Both are essential. Suppose an outcome evaluation tells us that our efforts fell short of achieving the desired results. In such a case, process evaluation might tell us why. Conversely, process evaluation may also help us identify approaches, strategies, processes, and actions that contributed to a program’s success. In essence, outcome and process evaluation are inextricably intertwined.

Deciding What to Evaluate

Before moving forward with evaluation activities, a decision needs to be made regarding what to evaluate. Unfortunately, deciding what to evaluate can sometimes be more difficult than actually conducting the evaluation.

Obviously, there are many things about a program that could be evaluated. If we focus on examining the process by which the program was delivered, what elements of that process should be examined? If we decide to evaluate whether or not the desired outcomes were achieved, what level of outcome does it make sense to measure?

Revisiting the Program Logic Model

The first step in deciding what to evaluate is to revisit the program logic model that was developed for the program. Since the program logic model graphically depicts how a program is supposed to operate, it will likely stimulate some thought about what should be evaluated.

Either by yourself or with a small group of people, review the logic model for the program and make notes of items you feel should be examined. For example, you may want to know if printed materials were appropriate for the target audience. After looking at the desired outcomes for the program, you may decide that you are interested in finding out if the learning which occurred in the program participants translated into behavioral changes. Continue reviewing the logic model until you have developed a list of perhaps a half dozen evaluation questions.

It is unlikely that all of the questions on the list will ultimately be answered. Some things are too costly to evaluate. Some are too time consuming. Some things we simply don’t know how to evaluate. Consequently, the goal of evaluation is to provide maximally useful information given the setting and constraints within which the program operates. What is actually evaluated is based on what makes sense for a particular program. One important consideration in deciding what ultimately gets evaluated is stakeholder needs for information.
Stakeholder Needs for Information

A stakeholder can be defined as anyone who has a stake or interest in your efforts. In general, stakeholders want to know if your efforts merit their endorsement, investment, or involvement. Stakeholders need information from you that helps them make that assessment. Some typical stakeholder groups include the County Extension Council, funders, administrators, collaborators, elected officials, volunteers, business leaders, and potential program participants. You are also a stakeholder with certain information needs. Every program or community effort will have its own set of stakeholders.

It is important to note that stakeholders may use different criteria to determine what constitutes a high quality or successful effort. Some stakeholders want to know if the funds devoted to your effort were used in an appropriate manner. Another stakeholder group may want to know the characteristics of the people who participated in the program. Still other stakeholders many want specific information about how those people benefited from their involvement.

It is often beneficial to make a list of the key stakeholders for a particular program. Then identify the specific information needs of each stakeholder. Compare the list of information needs to the list of evaluation questions generated earlier. Focus your evaluation on the questions which, when answered, provide stakeholders with information useful to them.

The Evaluation Plan

It is important to recognize that evaluation activities actually begin in the design phase of program development. Soon after the logic model is developed it is time to start developing an evaluation plan for the program. An evaluation plan is developed for each evaluation question. For each evaluation question, an indicator, a method, and a timeline are specified.

- Evaluation questions determine the focus of an evaluation. They identify what it is we want to learn through our evaluation activities. Evaluation questions can be written for both process and outcome evaluations. Below is a plausible evaluation question for a program which encourages physical activity.

  Did previously inactive program participants become physically active as a result of their participation in the program?

- Indicators are the specific things that we look at to determine the answers to our evaluation questions. They tend to define how success will be measured. While knowledge of a particular subject may be a desired outcome, a score on a standardized test may be an indicator of knowledge. In the example above, one could conceive of many different indicators of physical activity. Below is one example.

  Participants will be considered physically active if they achieve a minimum of 30 minutes of sustained physical activity per day at least five days a week for eight weeks.
Methods include the procedures, techniques, and processes used to measure the indicators as defined. Some popular evaluation methods include tests, questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, activity logs, and observation. Evaluation methods can be quantitative or qualitative in nature. Quantitative methods produce data which can be expressed numerically. Qualitative methods are used to gather data that is not easily quantifiable. Fact sheets on a number of different evaluation methods can be found at http://www.ca.uky.edu/AgPSD/soregion.htm. Here is a sample description of a method used to record physical activity.

Program participants first complete a baseline assessment of physical activity. Upon commencement of their activity regimen, participants begin recording physical activity in a daily log. A follow-up questionnaire is administered at the end of the program.

The timeline states when evaluation activities will occur. For example, some data collection activities need to take place while the program is being conducted. Tests of knowledge may be administered at the conclusion of instructional activities. But a follow-up questionnaire of behavior may need to be mailed to participants six-weeks after the program has ended. Here’s an example of an item which may appear on the evaluation timeline for a physical activity program.

The follow-up questionnaire will be administered eight weeks after the baseline assessment of physical activity is completed.

Communicating Evaluation Results

Earlier in this publication we discussed how stakeholder information needs influence what we choose to evaluate. But our responsibility to stakeholders does not end with conducting the evaluation. We must then figure out how to best get the results of our evaluation into the hands of the people who need it.

One important stakeholder group which must not be overlooked is the County Extension Council (CEC). Early in the program development process, the CEC was involved in identifying critical issues which Extension might address through its programming efforts. Program plans are a contract, of sorts, with the people of the county to deliver programming relevant to those issues. We must make sure that we complete the program development cycle by providing appropriate feedback to the people who sanctioned our work. By doing so we further strengthen our linkages with the public.

The method you choose for getting information to stakeholders will vary according to stakeholder needs. Some stakeholders might want a brief written summary of key accomplishments. Others may want a more detailed report. Still others may prefer an oral presentation.