Writing Powerful Impact Statements

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Impact Statements should include a discussion of (1) the importance of the issue being addressed, (2) the role of Extension, (3) the nature of the educational program that was conducted, and (4) the impact that was realized (including a description of the evaluation method used to assess the impact). Although the impact of the program is the most important of these four elements, discussion of the other elements is necessary to help the reader fully understand the significance of the accomplishment. The sections below more fully describe the four elements of an impact statement.

Importance of the Issue Being Addressed - Extension programs are often developed in response to needs identified through local program development processes. During that process, local citizens are involved in setting program priorities and designing programs that meet local needs. Briefly describing how the issue was identified at the local level is one way of communicating importance. Other times, research findings help communicate the importance of an issue. For example, we have learned that certain preventive health practices delay or prevent the onset of a particular chronic condition. In these cases, citing these research findings may be enough to legitimize your program with stakeholders. But our relevance and credibility are greatest when we can show how **applied research** is being used to address **local needs and issues**.

Example - *A recent study revealed that our county ranked third in the state in the incidence of colon cancer.*

Role of Extension - Extension can serve in a number of different program-related roles. There are times when a program is solely sponsored and conducted by Extension. Other times Extension is the lead agency in a multi-organizational effort. Other times we are simply a partner in a collaborative effort. In others our role is minimal. So, in communicating the impact of programs we must do the best job we can in spelling out Extensions role in producing the results. We shortchange ourselves when we fail to take credit for that which we were uniquely responsible. But when we claim credit for accomplishments we had no part in, we damage the organization's image and credibility. Be bold, but fair.

Example - *The OSU Extension Service recruited community members and local professionals to serve as members of a community coalition to address this issue. The coalition included representatives of Extension, the county health department, three civic organizations, and four physicians.*

Nature of the Educational Program - It is also important to briefly describe what it was that produced the impact being reported. Therefore, it is important to make sure that the text of the impact statement includes adequate description of the program. Was it a six week training school or a home visitation program? How was it implemented? What was taught? Who participated in the program? How was the program linked to achievement of the outcome? As you write, be careful of using terms and jargon that the reader doesn't understand. Don't assume that a reader will know what a program is all about simply by it's title.

Example - The coalition developed a multi-faceted awareness campaign promoting preventive screenings for adults ages 50 and over. The campaign featured educational programs at regular meetings of local clubs and organizations, radio PSAs by colon cancer survivors urging regular screenings and exams, newspaper articles, and informational flyers placed in grocery bags during the entire month of February.

Impact and Evaluation Method - Bennett and Rockwell (1995) have developed a model that identifies seven types of information that we can collect about a program. The data collected at each level of the model communicates greater evidence of a programs effectiveness than the preceding level. The seven levels of their model are from highest to lowest:

• SEEC - changes in social, economic, or environmental conditions
• Practices - things participants are doing as a result of the program
• KOSA - changes in knowledge, opinions, skills, and aspirations
• Reactions - participant's feelings about a program
• Participation - number and type of people who participated
• Activities - what was done, type of the interaction with the participant
• Inputs - resources expended for the program

Impact is frequently described as KOSA, Practice or SEEC level changes that can be directly attributed to the program being evaluated. An impact statement, therefore, must include a discussion of at least one of these types of program impact. Furthermore, it is assumed that some sort of purposeful and systematic process was used to generate the information being reported as impact. There are various ways to determine a program's impact. These include interviews, questionnaires, systematic observation, testing, examination of secondary data, and use of key informants. Be sure to include a brief description of the evaluation procedure used in each impact statement.

Example - A total of 414 different individuals participated in the educational programs conducted at community meetings. Eight weeks after the program each of the 414 individuals received a mailed questionnaire asking them whether or not they have either scheduled or received a screening or exam. 186 individuals returned the questionnaire for a response rate of 45%. 85 of the respondents indicated they had either scheduled or received appropriate screenings. Doctors have confirmed that screenings and exams have resulted in two cases of cancer being detected in early stages of development that otherwise would have gone unnoticed.