

WRITING EXTENSION IMPACT STATEMENTS

University of Tennessee

You have successfully completed your Extension program. The program went well and the individuals who completed the program have made changes based on your program that have improved their lives. Now it is time to share your success with program stakeholders by writing an effective impact statement. What do you need to include in the impact statement to best present the results of your program? An effective impact statement can show the value of your programs to those who make decisions about program resources or those who influence the decision makers. This document discusses some of the key considerations necessary when considering the content and the organization of the impact statement. Click on one of the following links below to view a specific section of the document:

IMPACT STATEMENT FORMAT

In 1996, the Cooperative States Research, Education and Extension Service (CSREES), the Federal partner of the state Extension services, developed a national database for the collection and compilation of impact statements from the state/territorial Extension services and agricultural experiment stations. As a result of this national database, a format was developed for the impact statements submitted. The format has six information sections for each impact statement: the Title, the Issue, What has been done, the program Impact, the Funding source(s) and the program Contact(s). This format is a concise, straightforward way to document program accomplishments. In Tennessee, we have adopted this format for our Narrative Accomplishment Reports (NARS) that are submitted through the University of Tennessee Agricultural Extension Service Management Information System (MIS).

The impact statement format has also allowed us to utilize NARS reports for a variety of accountability purposes, thereby reducing the number of reports requested of Extension personnel. It is hoped that additional uses of the information reported in impact statements will be found.

LENGTH OF THE IMPACT STATEMENT

Research and experience have shown us that decision makers have limited time to read reports. A study in North Carolina indicated that elected officials prefer to receive information in reports of one page or less. When writing an impact statement, keep in mind the audience(s) who will be reading the report. In most cases, they will be people with limited time. Try to keep an impact statement brief and to the point. Three important words to remember when writing an impact statement are: **Brief**, **Concise** and **Readable**. A one-page or less report can provide adequate information about what issue was addressed, what efforts were expended to address the issue and what happened as a result of those efforts.

SECTIONS OF THE IMPACT STATEMENT

TITLE:

The impact statement title is a short descriptive statement that identifies the main idea or theme of the report. The title should give a reader a pretty good idea of what subject area will be addressed in the report. A title should not be too wordy.

ISSUE:

In the Issue section, you should describe in one or two sentences what is the issue being addressed by the program. This section should identify who cares about this issue and why the issue is important enough to be addressed by the Extension program. In the case of programs that were planned in the Extension Plan of Work, the issue statement will probably come directly from the Statement of Issue(s) section of the Plan of Work narrative.

The issue statement should identify information that demonstrates that the issue is a problem. Avoid making sweeping statements that are not supported by some evidence that the issue is a problem or a priority in the county, district or statewide.

WHAT HAS BEEN DONE:

In describing what has been done, tell in a few sentences what program activities have been conducted. Program activities are those things that you did to deliver the educational program to achieve the objectives of the program. Program activities can include group educational meetings, one-on-one meetings with clientele, field days, tours, etc. When describing the program activities, identify the subject matter covered in the activities. Identify the quantity of program activities as much as possible. Instead of saying, "the program was delivered through group meetings and one-on-one consultation with program participants," you should identify specific numbers of activities, such as, "A series of four group educational sessions were conducted on the use of recommended forage handling practices followed by one-on-one on-farm visits with 32 forage producers to discuss utilization of practices for individual situations."

IMPACT:

The Impact section is where you describe what happened as a result of the efforts described in the "What has been done" section. The impact described should reflect what has happened to the program participants as a result of their participation. Using the Bennett/Rockwell Targeting Outcomes of Programs (T.O.P.) Model, this is where we identify what changes have taken place in the participants' knowledge, skills, attitudes or aspirations (KASA); what practices or behaviors have been adopted or used to a greater degree (Practice Change); and what social, economic or environmental changes have occurred as a result of the adoption of those practices (SEEC Changes). The changes that have occurred should be supported by evidence collected as part of the program evaluation process. In many cases, this evidence will be quantitative in nature, but qualitative, anecdotal evidence can also be used to document impact of programs. The combination of quantitative and qualitative evidence can be powerful evidence of impact.

Types of Quantitative Data

Program inputs and results can be quantified at any level of the program. Statistical information can be reported for the resources expended in conducting the program; the number of program activities that took place; the number of individuals participating in the program; the numerical changes that took place in the participants' knowledge, attitudes, skills and aspirations; the number of individuals who adopted new practices or behaviors; and the numerical social, economic and environmental changes that took place. Most often the quantitative data collected to demonstrate impact of a program is identified during the program planning process. As you develop a program Plan of Work, keep in mind the types of information that you will need to collect to demonstrate program impact and develop an evaluation plan to collect them.

The following list contains typical types of quantitative program information collected and reported in impact statements:

C Data about level of involvement

C Number of participants involved

C Percent change in enrollment or participation (e.g., enrollment increased by 50%)

C Actual numerical change in enrollment or participation (e.g., enrollment grew from 32 to 78 participants)

C Data about knowledge, attitude, skills and aspiration changes

C Changes in knowledge scores

C Percent change in knowledge

C Actual change scores (e.g., the average knowledge increased from 50 correct on the pre-test to 75 on the posttest)

C Data concerning practice changes

C Number of people who adopted new practices/behaviors

C Percent change in adoption

C Actual number of individuals changing (e.g., the number of individuals washing their hands before preparing food increased from 25 to 73)

C Data concerning social, economic or environmental conditions

C Calculation of cost/benefit ratio

C Numbers of people who benefited

C Increases in yield or income

C Decreases in actual number of cases (e.g., resulted in a reduction of two applications of pesticide)

Qualitative Data

Qualitative data in impact statements usually are quotes taken from comments collected as part of the program evaluation. The most useful qualitative data are the perceptions and opinions expressed by program participants or by external, unbiased observers of program results. A statement by an Extension agent that the program had a positive impact on participants or the community sounds a little self-serving, but a similar comment from a participant, a parent, a teacher or a community leader is strong evidence of the impact of the program. When using qualitative evidence, be sure to identify the source of the comment, not by name, but by title (e.g., program participant, a parent, a teacher, etc.).

The data you use as evidence of impact may be adequate in explaining the value of the program. However, you may need to include a short statement clarifying the value of the outcomes described. For instance, if the impact of the program is increased knowledge of the participants, you may want to identify what the value of having this knowledge will be to the participants (e.g., youth increasing their knowledge of educational requirements for their desired careers will help them as they select their courses in high school or change their post-secondary education plans).

FUNDING SOURCES:

Identifying funding sources of a program can help show how we often utilize resources from a variety of sources to conduct our programs. This section is especially important if the program receives funding support from sources other than regular Extension funds. Identify the sources of funds that have helped in the planning and delivery of the program, including regular Extension funds. Examples of external funding sources might be: grant providers, local businesses, commodity groups, professional organizations, etc.).

POINTS FOR WRITING THE IMPACT STATEMENT NARRATIVE

How the narrative sections of the impact statement are written and formatted affects how easily the narrative can be read, or if it is read at all. The following are suggestions for writing the narrative so that it is easier to read and understand.

Packing It In

Sometimes there is a tendency to pack a lot of information into a written paragraph. If a narrative is describing a number of different ideas and their supporting details in one long paragraph, this can be very confusing and tedious to read. The "packed" paragraph can be improved by discussing each idea in a separate paragraph or bulleted statement.

It is tempting, especially if the "official" deadline for submitting impact statements is fast approaching, to try and squeeze several similar, yet distinct programs into one impact statement. If topics included in an impact statement are really describing more than one program effort, a good idea would be to separate the two and create an impact statement for each program effort. It may take a little more time to create the extra statement, but it will be much more valuable for the reader to be able to see each program effort more clearly.

Avoid Vague Words

Vague words, such as: relatively, few, almost, some, usually, approximately, highly, often, appreciable, nearly, many and significant. Even a reader familiar with Extension will not know how many program participants are a "significant" number of participants.

Delete Excess

Remember, three words you need to remember when writing an impact statement are: **Brief**, **Concise** and **Readable**. One thing that can be done to contribute to all three of these ideas is to delete extra words, even whole sentences that do not contribute to telling the story or that add no new information. Being able to pare down sentences is a skill best learned through practice. Read over the impact statement narrative specifically looking for words or sentences that can be deleted without negatively affecting the story.

Use Active Voice Sentences

In an active voice sentence, the subject of the sentence does the action of the verb. In a passive voice sentence, the subject receives the action. The passive voice, a form of *to be* followed by a participle (e.g., *was presented*), is a wordier sentence construction than is the active voice and lacks the active voice's strength. Whenever possible and appropriate, use the active voice to emphasize what your program *does* or what people *do*, not what is *being done*.

Proofread Your Narrative

An impact statement full of errors, whether factual, grammatical or spelling, looks unprofessional. The reader of such a document may even question your credibility. After you have finished writing your narrative, check it for typographical, grammatical and other errors, and correct them. Asking someone else to read your impact statement is another good way of spotting problems. Someone who is not so close to either the program or the written statement may spot errors that you may have overlooked or raise questions about how the narrative explains the program and its results.

Plan Your Impact Statement When you Plan Your Program

When you are developing your Plan of Work, it is not too early to be thinking about how the impact statement for that program might look. If the Statement of Issue(s) section of your POW is well done, the Issues section of the impact statement is almost completed. If the Key Program Components section of the POW is well thought out, you will already have an idea of how the What Has Been Done section of the impact statement might look. If your POW program objectives are clear and the evaluation framework has identified what measures will be collected to evaluate the program, you should also have a pretty good idea of what the Impact section of the impact statement will include as evidence of program success. Asking yourself how the impact statement might look while completing the Plan of Work may help you in clarifying the POW. At that point, it's just a matter of conducting the program and writing about its success in the impact statement!

EXTENSION IMPACT STATEMENT EXAMPLES

The following examples of Impact Statements were selected from the Narrative Accomplishment Reports submitted to the Tennessee Agricultural Extension Service Management Information System (MIS). While there is no such thing as a "perfect" impact statement, these examples were selected because they, for the most part, present a clear and concise statement of why the program was conducted, what took place in the program and what were the results/impacts of the program. The statements are presented not so much to serve as templates for impact statements, to be used as fill-in-the-blanks forms, but as representative ways in which impact statements can be written that are useful for accountability purposes with our stakeholders.

EXTENSION IMPACT STATEMENT

EXAMPLES

Title: Communications Skill Building

Issue: Students need to increase their oral and written communication skills, according to teachers, parents, employers, and other stakeholders. Students have limited opportunities to learn and to demonstrate skills learned in this area. Communications skills objectives have been identified and included in the Core Curriculum for Davidson County students in grades 4-6. The Davidson County 4-H Advisory Committee and Metro teachers responding to teacher surveys emphasize that the 4-H staff continue to teach communication skills to youth enrolled in 4-H and to offer opportunities for students to demonstrate skills learned.

What Has Been Done: 312 4-H members were enrolled in 13 4-H clubs. Educational programs were presented in the areas of parliamentary procedure, public speaking, visual communications,

oral presentations using visuals, and written communications. A program assessment instrument was developed to gather data relating to the impact of the program.

Impact: Students demonstrating skills learned by participation in communications activities:

Number Percent of students enrolled

Public Speaking 172-55%

Art Poster 195-63%

Project Demonstrations 214-69%

Written Communications 146-47%

Teachers responding to the communications program assessment indicated that:

C More than 80 percent of students increased their knowledge in each of the communications areas.

C More than 70 percent of students increased their skill level in each area.

C More than 70 percent of students utilized or demonstrated communication behaviors and practices through participation in 4-H activities and in other classroom situations as a result of the 4-H communications program.

Sixty-one percent of students exhibited increased self confidence as a result of the communications educational program. One teacher noted that "It really helped my students feel more confident about speaking out in class. I have one student that has gone from holding her head down in class to volunteering to answer questions."

Title: Character Education: Character Counts! in Sevier County

Issue: Due to rising concern of violence among youth in the schools, Sevier County Board of Education was looking to adopt a character development program among the schools. Also concerned with juvenile violence and crime in the community, the District Attorney General was also interested in promoting Character Counts! in the community. This community involvement would reinforce the significance of good character values to the children, as well as the adults.

What was done: Sevier County 4-H adopted Character Counts! as its educational theme for the year. 4-H faculty developed programs on the 4 pillars of "Respect, Responsibility, Citizenship and Caring", which were incorporated into monthly 4-H Club meetings. These 4 pillars were taught by agents and trained teens in classroom settings.

Twenty-four teens were trained to teach 4 pillars to 50 children at local day care centers this summer.

The Extension agent, became a charter member of the Character Counts Coalition in Sevier County. From this group, a Character Counts Kick-Off was planned and implemented in May for the entire county. As a coalition member, the Extension agent also spoke to the Sevierville Noon Day Rotary concerning the significance of Character Counts and 4-H's involvement with the program. Forty-five people were in this audience, which was primarily composed of civic leaders.

Impact: All 4-H activities and contests related to Character Counts! for the 1998-1999 school year. In the county, 2500 4-H members participated in educational programs for 4 months on the pillars of "Respect, Responsibility, Caring and Citizenship". Of these: 1781 did posters, 1905 presented speeches and 1747 wrote essays on "character". 80 percent of club members expressed "caring" evidence from their community service projects. With this introduction of Character Counts! from 4-H and the success of the pilot school, a total of 6 schools in Sevier County adopted Character Counts! for the 1999-2000 school year.

TITLE: Corn Producers Increase Revenue Using Improved Production Practices

ISSUE: Monroe County, Tennessee corn growers have averaged harvesting 2500 acres of corn for silage for the past three years. Most of this silage is the primary stored forage used to support the county's Grade A dairy industry which generates approximately \$12 million in agricultural revenue. Research and on-farm demonstration results have shown that a significant variation in yield potential exist among available corn varieties. Research and on-farm demonstrations have also shown substantial economic returns through improved silage quality and yield to be realized from efficient weed control.

The Monroe County Agricultural Advisory Committee, members of the Agricultural Extension Committee and area agricultural farm suppliers suggested that available corn hybrids (varieties) be evaluated under local growing conditions as to their potential for corn silage production.

WHAT HAS BEEN DONE: The Extension agent planned, organized and assisted in conducting a variety evaluation with corn for silage. Other activities supporting this teaching objective have included a Hay and Silage Clinic, field day, crop tour, a series of weed control (herbicide) demonstrations, radio programs, circular letters, farm visits, crop weed management meeting and numerous other one-on-one contacts were utilized to teach producers the advantages of planting

U.T. recommended varieties of corn for silage and using appropriate weed control/management technology.

IMPACT: By selecting corn varieties from the top 25 percent of the varieties evaluated, based on yield of 65 percent moisture silage, as compared to the lowest 25 percent of the varieties in 1999; silage producers can increase yields by 3 tons per acre. All yields for 1999 were depressed by severe drought. Yield differences have varied by 7 tons per acre with near normal growing conditions. A survey of corn silage producers representing near 40 percent of the area's corn

silage production indicated that 84 percent of these producers were using U.T. recommended corn varieties for their silage production. With a yield increase of 5 tons of silage per acre due to variety selection on 40 percent of the county's corn silage acreage, producers are realizing an increase in revenue amounting to \$100,000.00 per year (1000 acres x 5 tons x \$20.00/ton). Improvement in yield and quality of silage realized through efficient weed control/management will further enhance the returns to the corn silage crop.

The weed control demonstrations have shown that "yield robbing" problem weeds can be controlled with U-T recommended herbicides. Producers will receive the results of the weed control demonstrations for use in planning their 2000 corn silage production program.

TITLE: Parenting Education in Grundy County, TN

ISSUE: Lack of employment opportunities, low levels of education, lack of family support, the number of food stamp recipients (23 percent of the population), the number of children on free and reduced lunches (76 percent), and the high divorce rate in the county were factors considered by an Extension coalition/advisory committee in recommending the continuance of Extension parenting education programs in Grundy County, TN.

WHAT HAS BEEN DONE: Extension planned and conducted weekly parenting education classes during the past year (40 total classes, average attendance of 16-18 individuals/class). Extension also offered co-parenting classes for divorced parents (8 classes taught with an attendance of 16). Weekly home visits by the Extension agent reinforced the concepts taught in the classes (average of 32 visits/month, with an average of 50 contacts/month). An Extension coalition group developed and opened a parenting resource center. The presence of the resource center has resulted in additional classes being offered in clothing construction, cooking school and computer instruction. Individualized instruction has also been available to parents and home-school clientele. The resource center provides a variety of resource materials that may be checked out for assistance in all areas of family and consumer sciences.

IMPACT: A follow-up evaluation of co-parenting classes revealed that:

S 90 percent of parents felt the classes had helped with the divorce/separation;

S 70 percent responded they were better able to keep their children out of the conflict;

S 80 percent responded that communication with their children was working well, with no conflicts.

Additional comments from parents attending the weekly scheduled classes indicated concepts learned:

- "I enjoy coming to parenting because it gives me the chance to work and know other people and learn new ideas to share with my family."

- "With six children (4, 6, 9, 11, 13, and 14), I have learned how to identify their needs and try to make decisions that are best for them in relation to their ages (e.g., discipline)."
- "Parenting has helped me learn ways to cope with stress in more positive ways, instead of yelling at my family."
- "I have learned about food safety and its importance."
- "I have more patience with my child than I did before I started attending parenting classes."
- "My self-confidence is greatly improved--the class makes me feel like I am an important person and that people care about me."

TITLE: Building Financial Management Skills in Gibson County

ISSUE: Per capita, the state of Tennessee has the highest bankruptcy rate in the United States. Currently, 1 out of every 43 families in the state file for bankruptcy. West Tennessee filing rates are even more alarming, with more than twice as many filings occurring in the region than in other parts of the state (212 in Gibson County in 1998). The high number of persons filing Chapter 13 bankruptcy showed the lack of basic financial management skills and the need for educational programs in this area.

WHAT HAS BEEN DONE: Extension established a partnership with the Office of the Trustee, Chapter 13 Bankruptcy, and with Consumer Credit Counseling of Memphis, to provide basic financial management classes to Chapter 13 clients. Two financial management classes were taught with 38 persons attending. Three classes taught by Extension have been open for the public with 42 persons attending. Biweekly newspaper articles on basic financial management were also written and sent out to the county's four newspapers with six being printed. Two articles were written for the Extension Family and Consumer Science newsletter with 430 persons receiving a copy of newsletter. A 4-week program called "Reality Check" was used in one of the local middle schools with 120 seventh and eighth graders participating. One-on-one financial management teaching was done with 4 individuals.

IMPACT: Financial management class evaluations show the following:

With a total of 84 persons attending classes that were evaluated:

- 73 persons planned to develop spending plans
- 67 persons plan to develop a savings
- 65 persons planned to improve their spending habits

Follow up evaluations showed that:

- 45 persons developed spending plans
- 28 persons began a savings plan with an average of \$15.00 per month being saved
- 33 persons improved their spending habits.

Title: Madison County Youth EFNEP

Issue: Many limited resource youth have poor health skills and limited knowledge of the relationship of health practices and health status. EFNEP curriculum has the materials that enable these youth to easily learn basic nutrition, health and food safety skills. A limited amount of EFNEP paraprofessional time is devoted to teaching these skills.

What Has Been Done: An EFNEP paraprofessional time taught 740 youth basic nutrition skills. 96% of these youth were elementary age. Four percent were teens. These youth were taught in 28 groups with each group averaging six 45 minutes lessons. These youth could all be considered high risk intercity children as they all were residents of housing projects in inner-city Jackson.

Impact:

As a result of participating in the EFNEP program:

666 of the youth reported eating a greater variety of foods after the lessons

666 of the youth also reported that they had increased their knowledge of nutrition and its relationship to overall health

658 of the youth reported that they were better able to select low cost, nutritious foods

643 of the youth reported improved food safety practices

This improved knowledge and adoption of practices should help these individuals experience an increased level of health throughout their lives because of the early age at which some basic health practices have been learned and implemented.