Quick Tips

Ways to Improve the Quality of Your Program Evaluations

Improve the quality of your UW-Extension program evaluations by using these four main ideas – utility, feasibility, propriety and accuracy. The American Evaluation Association\(^1\) embraces these as standards for “good” program evaluation.

Below are some questions you should ask when you plan, conduct and review UW-Extension program evaluations. Compare your plan, design and/or summary to the ideas presented here, some of which have been adapted to evaluation in the context of UW-Extension. Ask yourself, how well does my program evaluation address each item? In what ways can I make changes to the current or planned program evaluation to better address these items?

Discuss these items with an evaluation specialist, mentor, program area colleague or program leaders – anyone who can help you improve your program evaluations and who is interested in learning about the results of your educational programming.

Utility: How useful is your program evaluation to you and your audience(s)?

1. State purpose clearly. Clearly state the purpose(s) of the evaluation – the reason(s) why you are doing your evaluation.

2. Consider audience(s). Describe the users of the evaluation and the type of information they require, request and find credible.

3. Communicate findings. Plan how to share the information with others, what format(s) will you use and how you can increase the chances that they will use the information.

4. Provide value. Draw a connection between your evaluation and how it provides useful information that serves the stated purpose of the evaluation. Discuss whether the evaluation provides new information and/or if it confirms previous information.

Feasibility: How practical is your program evaluation?

1. Show practicality. Show that your evaluation does not disrupt the program or its participants and that you can implement it as planned given the costs, resources and situation.

2. Consider political viability. Predict any political contingencies or potential consequences that might affect implementation of your evaluation or the use or misuse of its results.

3. Calculate costs relative to benefits. Determine whether the value of potential

\(^1\) The standards are selected and adapted from *The Program Evaluation Standards* (Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation, 1994); http://www.eval.org/EvaluationDocuments/progeval.html that serve as professional guidelines for program evaluation.
findings might be justified in comparison to their cost – include your time and labor, support staff time, photocopies, transcriptions of audiotapes, postage and other expenses.

Propriety: How appropriate is your program evaluation for those who are involved?


2. Disclose findings properly. Plan the appropriate communication of findings to all persons involved in or affected by your evaluation.

3. Assess completely and fairly. Examine strengths and weaknesses of the program so that you can use the information for program improvement.

Accuracy: How accurate is your program evaluation and the technical information it conveys?

1. Describe program and its implementation. Describe and document your program clearly and accurately and present evidence that your program is clearly identifiable as an effort of UW-Extension.

2. Explain evaluation procedures. Describe your evaluation questions and procedures in enough detail so that someone else could replicate your evaluation and/or determine its adequacy.

3. Demonstrate defensible information sources. Describe your sources of information in enough detail so that their appropriateness can be determined.

4. Ensure valid and reliable information. If you use quantitative measures, demonstrate validity – that you measure what you claim to measure – and reliability – that you use measurement that is “consistent and stable from one use to the next.”

5. Use appropriate analyses. Analyze data appropriately and correctly. Describe qualitative and/or quantitative analyses in a way that would allow them to be replicated by another person.

6. Draw justified conclusions. Link your interpretation to the data. Consider alternative explanations for documented program outcomes. Do not draw generalizations beyond what your evidence can support.

7. Report impartially. Communicate the evaluation findings and not your feelings, opinions or biases.

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