

strategies for involvement

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introduction

Extension is dedicated to helping people improve the quality of their lives through a deeper understanding of social issues; a commitment to community problem-solving processes; or the adoption of a new and better technique or practice for accomplishing specific goals.

Extension faculty and community members work together in advisory groups and planning committees to design programs that will meet people's needs. Because effective Extension programs are developed with people rather than for people, involvement becomes the key to success.

What Is Involvement?

When we involve people in a program-planning session, a problemsolving group, or an informational meeting, we're asking that they *invest* themselves in that activity. The investment may be in the form of time or money, or it may often be a psychological commitment to an idea or method. For example, the individual who attends an informational meeting will invest time and money to attend it. The person who participates in a program-planning session will also invest time and money, but in addition he'll be asked to take an active role in identifying problems and solutions. The 4-H Club member will also be asked to make an investment when he agrees to prepare an exhibit for the county fair. In each of the preceding examples, individuals are involved because they have invested themselves in the activity.

investment decisions

When making investment decisions, individuals examine a variety of factors to get some idea of the costs involved and the benefits to be gained. If the costs outweigh the projected benefits, the individual probably won't make the investment. If the benefits seem larger than the costs, the person probably will make the investment.

Investments may be either "low risk" or "high risk." A person attending an information meeting has made a "low risk" investment because there are few costs and the potential for failure (no benefits) is minimal. A 4-H project leader, on the other hand, has made a "high risk" investment because the costs are high and the potential for failure is great. That person may invest a great deal of time and energy as a leader only to find that club members lose interest and consequently the project is left undone. Other "high risk" investments include program-planning sessions and community problem-solving groups. In many "high risk" activities, individuals are asked to "expose" themselves by publicly stating their ideas and feelings. In so doing, they put their reputations on the line.

Having made an investment, involved people usually take a much more active interest in the program, and they are also more committed to its success. Programs that involve people pay great dividends, not only to the individuals but also to the professionals and organizations that sponsor them. Thus, the factors that people examine as they make investment decisions are vitally important to us as we involve them in programming.

When making an investment decision, a person is primarily interested in two things:

1. What will get out of it? (**benefits**)
2. What will have to put into it? (**costs**)

Therefore, if you're anxious to understand why people do or don't become involved in your programs, you must analyze each of your programs in terms of costs and benefits.

If the *benefits are greater* than the costs and if people know about your program, they'll probably become involved.

If the *costs are greater* than the benefits, then very few people are likely to get involved in your programs.

steps to action

This booklet is designed to help you identify and analyze the costs and benefits of participation in your program. Since it's important that you be as specific as possible, the following procedure will help you minimize costs and maximize benefits.

- 1. think about extension's image in your community**
- 2. consider the factors behind investment decisions**
- 3. examine each of your programs in terms of specific benefits to be gained from participation.**
- 4. examine each of your programs in terms of what it will cost people to participate.**
- 5. compare and analyze the costs and benefits listed for each program.**

STEP 1

think about extension's image in your community

Take a long, hard look at Extension in your community. Do you see any weak links you might be able to strengthen? In what areas is your programming strong? The more positive your image is to the public, the better your chances for involving people. They'll see more benefits to be gained from involvement if they think your programs are stimulating and interesting, than if they think they're dull and confusing. People are more apt to get involved in programs that are real to them.

Various groups and individuals will view your organization differently, depending on the experiences they've had (or haven't had) with Extension or similar groups. For example, the experiences and expectations of welfare mothers in a housing project will be completely different than those of a well-established group of business people.

Are there certain groups of people you've ignored entirely in your work? People who think Extension fails to serve their needs are unlikely to get-or stay-involved in your programs. Are you known for working solely with one or two interest groups within your community? Do you shy away from free, open discussion on some issues? If the answer to any of these questions is yes, probably some people in your community feel Extension isn't serving their needs. These people aren't likely to get or stay-involved in your programs unless you change your image. Reversing a negative image is difficult and time-consuming, but it's essential if you want to provide effective programs that generate public involvement.



**action
section**

Here are some questions to ask yourself to get a better idea of how people in your community view Extension. The answers may help you identify your strengths and weaknesses in terms of the different audiences you hope to reach, so you'll be able to develop a strategy for involving more people in worthwhile programs.

Questions About Program Relevancy

- Can people really use the information you give them?
- How do they use that information?
- How can you tell they're using it?
- Are the subjects you deal with real to the people you hope to reach?

Your comments:

Questions About Specific Client Problems

- Is your main function to give out information or to serve as a problem-solving facilitator?
- Do you answer specific questions by providing a handy, but marginally useful pamphlet? Or do you take the time to find other, more relevant references?
- What do you do when you don't know the answers to a question or problem?
- What do you do if there are no answers?

Your comments:

Questions About the Scope of Your Programs

- Do you work primarily with specific groups of people-white, middle-class, middle-of-the-road, etc.?
- Do you encourage free, open discussion of all issues?
Does that include controversial subjects?
- Do you present all sides of an issue?
- Do you provide information about things you personally oppose?

Your comments:

Questions About Programs

- Are they all in the same format?
- Are they scheduled to conflict with other important community events?
- Do you take time to get the best speaker, or do you settle for second best?
Do you expect people to listen to someone who may only be moderately informed?
- Do people enjoy taking part in your programs and projects?
- Are your mass media efforts well produced?
Are they clear and easy to understand?

Your comments:

And Finally . . .

Do you get involved in so many things that you can't finish any of them?

STEP 2

Consider factors behind investment decisions

Now that you have some insight into how your community views Extension, it will be helpful to examine some of the factors people consider when trying to decide whether to participate in Extension programming. When it comes to involvement, people want to know what they'll get out of it, and what they'll have to put into it.



action section

On this and the next two pages, you'll find some questions people ask about your programs. Read them over carefully, and add your own in the space provided. Remember that even the most trivial sounding question can be very important to the person who's trying to make an investment decision.

People Ask About Time ...

What Do I Have To Put Into It? (costs)

- How long will the meeting last? Will it begin and end on time?
- Do I have to sit through a whole course, or read a whole book to get what I need?
- Will I be pressured into volunteering for a committee that will take up even more of my time?
- Is it really worth all the time it will take to learn something new when I don't even know if it can help me?
- Is this new way of doing things really valuable-even though it takes twice as long as the old way?
- Why should I wait until the meeting for information I need now?

What Might I Get Out Of It? (benefits)

- This might be a useful way for me to use some of my spare time.
- I might feel better doing something constructive instead of spending so much of my time doing passive things like watching television.
- I might learn how to put my time to better Use both at home and at work.
- I might pick up a hobby or interest that I could pursue in my leisure time.

People Ask About Learning Styles ...

What Do I Have To Put Into It?

(costs)

- Will I be able to understand the information?
- Will they be talking about things that are too new or too strange?
- Do I have to go to a meeting to get the information?
- Why can't the information be broadcast or put into print form?

What Might I Get Out of It?

(benefits)

- Maybe there'll be a chance to share my ideas with other people.
- I might learn something really stimulating or broaden my view on a certain subject.
- Maybe I'll be given a reading list so I can get further information.
- Maybe they'll be using a variety of media approaches I might enjoy

People Ask About Self-Esteem ...

What Do I Have To Put Into It?

(costs)

- Will people think I've turned to you because I'm a failure?
- Will it seem that I don't know very much?
- Will I feel out of place?
- Will I be called on to get up and talk in front of a group of people?
- Will I feel stupid if I don't understand what the speaker means?
- Will I feel like a child being told to memorize the "correct" answers?
- Will the experts be so busy talking that they fail to really listen to what I'm trying to tell them about my needs?

What Might I Get Out of It?

(benefits)

- Maybe I'll have the satisfaction of knowing that I've learned something new and exciting.
- Maybe others will admire me more because of the information I pick up at the meeting.
- I might end up a better person in some way.
- I might have the opportunity to share my ideas and realize that they're valuable in the eyes of others.
- I might pick up leadership or management skills.
- Maybe I'll develop more confidence in myself.

People Ask About Money ...

What Do I Have To Put Into It?

(costs)

- Can I afford gas for that long drive to the meeting?
- Will I have to pay for parking?
- Will there be a registration fee?
- Will I have to get a babysitter?
- Will I have to spend a lot of money on new equipment or techniques?

What Might I Get Out of It?

(benefits)

- Maybe I'll learn how to increase my profits.
- Maybe I'll pick up some management techniques that will pay off in terms of employee productivity?

People ask about Energy...

What Do I Have to Put Into It?

(costs)

- Do I have the energy for a new project?
- Will I have to give up something else that's important to me?
- Will I be so tired from participating that I will decide to drop out?
- Will the project tie me down?

What Might I Get Out of It?

(benefits)

- This might give me the opportunity to commit myself to a really worthwhile project.
- I could be using my efforts to accomplish something of value to others.

People ask about Physical Comfort...

What Do I Have to Put Into It?

(costs)

- Do I have to leave home to participate?
- Is the meeting place drab and dreary?
- Will there be a break so that I can stretch and relax?
- Will it be too warm or too cold?
- Are the chairs comfortable?
- Will I be able to see and hear the speaker?

What Might I Get Out of It?

(benefits)

- It might be nice to have an evening out.
- The meeting sounds like fun.
- Refreshments will be served.
- Maybe I'll learn something about how to improve my health so I'll feel better.

STEP 3

list program benefits

Your next step will be to examine each of your programs in terms of specific benefits. Presumably your programs have many benefits; otherwise you wouldn't waste time developing them. Higher profits, better health, more leisure time, fun and pleasure, mental stimulation, improvement of some facet of life-these certainly are benefits. But as you develop your benefits list, try to be more specific about what people can expect to get out of the program. People want to know WHAT the program will do for them, and WHY, WHEN, WHERE, and HOW it will make a difference in their lives.

For example, you say your program will increase peoples' financial well-being.

HOW?

Will it increase their business cash flow or demonstrate how they can cut down on fuel costs?

You say your program will ease the problems of aging.

HOW?

Will it provide information about social security and medicare, or will it tell people how to organize a senior citizens' club?

So, remember to be as specific as possible when talking about benefits. It's up to you to tell people exactly what they can expect to gain from your program. To do that, you've got to answer:

WHAT? WHY? WHEN? WHERE? HOW?



action section

Label a sheet of paper benefits. Since benefits can be broken down into three categories-taking part, acquiring information, and using information-use these headings in the far left margin as a guide.

Referring back to STEP 2, list all the possible benefits of the program being analyzed. Be sure to be as specific as possible by asking yourself, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, WHY, and HOW each time you think of a benefit.

Try to find ways to enhance the comfort and convenience of the participants-these are always important factors, regardless of the program. Don't worry about whether you'll actually be able to accomplish everything you put down on paper. Your objective for now is simply to identify as many benefits as possible.

Here's a sample of how you might begin compiling a benefits list for a program dealing with childhood nutrition.

Program: CHILDHOOD NUTRITION

Benefits

Taking part	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>meeting will begin and end promptly and last no longer than 2 hours</i>• <i>refreshments will be served</i>• <i>"social hour" to meet and exchange ideas with others</i>
Acquiring information	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>sample recipes available for use at home</i>• <i>program speakers: nutrition specialists, pediatricians</i>
Using information	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>chance to improve child health by providing greater resistance to disease and tooth decay</i>• <i>information about stretching food budget while eating nutritiously</i>

STEP 4



action section

list program costs

Now, label another sheet of paper **costs** and **cost reduction** ideas. Break the various costs of getting involved in the program into the same three categories you did for benefits-taking part, acquiring information, and using information. (You may find it helpful to refer back to STEPS 1 and 2.)

Next to each cost listed, write down an idea for minimizing that cost. Don't worry about whether you'll be able to follow through on each of those ideas-that will be determined later.

If you remember to be specific, you'll no doubt end up with a lengthy list of costs and cost reduction ideas-more than you'll be able to realistically act on. By incorporating into your programming the ideas that seem to be most feasible, you'll succeed in eliminating a cost by turning it into a benefit.

The following page contains the beginning of a cost and cost reduction list for the childhood nutrition example we used before.

Program: CHILDHOOD NUTRITION

Costs

Cost reduction ideas

Taking part	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>transportation problems</i>• <i>gas is expensive</i>• <i>parking problems</i>• <i>mothers need this info and will have to find babysitters</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>provide bus or van ride</i>• <i>organize a car pool</i>• <i>suggest where to park</i>• <i>provide nursery service at the meeting</i>
Acquiring information	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>some people dislike meetings</i>• <i>people may feel uncomfortable about remembering too many facts</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>produce radio and TV programs</i>• <i>hand out printed info in brochure form</i>
Using information	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>some women might prefer nonnutritious meals because they take less planning</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>provide a month's worth of simple, easy-to-follow menus</i>

STEP 5

compare and analyze program costs and benefits

Now you're ready to compare the costs and the benefits of involvement in the program. Take a few minutes to study the list carefully and then decide which ideas can realistically be incorporated into your programming.



action section

Before convincing people of a specific benefit, you should be sure you can carry through on it. For example-if you say there'll be nursery service provided by the 4-H Child Development Project, you'd better check first with the 4-H group. There's a big difference between a brilliant idea and an actual benefit. It's up to you to decide whether the idea can become a reality.

Put a plus sign (+) in front of each benefit that will definitely be provided, including the cost reduction ideas you plan to act on. Cross out all the costs that have been eliminated. Put a minus sign (-) in front of each cost that remains. Put a zero (0) in front of any cost reduction ideas that you're unable to use. To balance the costs and benefits of your program, simply count the number of pluses and compare them to the number of minuses. You should now have a pretty good idea of what your chances are for involving people in the program.

To see how it works, take a look at the sample list for the childhood nutrition project.

Program: CHILDHOOD NUTRITION

Benefits

Taking part	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + meeting will begin and end promptly and last no longer than 2 hours + refreshments will be served + "social hour" to meet and exchange ideas with others
Acquiring information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + sample recipes available for use at home + program speakers: nutrition specialists, pediatricians
Using information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + chance to improve child health by providing greater resistance to disease and tooth decay + information about stretching food budget while eating nutritiously

Costs

Cost reduction ideas

Taking part	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - transportation problems - gas is expensive parking problems mothers need this info and will have to find baby sitters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o provide bus or van ride o organize a car pool + suggest where to park + provide nursery service at the meeting
Acquiring information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - some people dislike meetings people may feel uncomfortable about remembering too many facts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o produce radio and TV programs + hand out printed info in brochure form
Using information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> some women might prefer nonnutritious meals because they take less planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + provide a month's worth of simple, easy-to-follow menus

Final analysis +11 -3

long-range analysis

Continue to analyze the costs and benefits of involvement throughout your entire program-not just in the initial stages. A person who has made a high-risk investment decision can change his mind during the course of the project if the costs become too high. During each phase of a program requiring long-range involvement, participants will continue to ask the same questions that were asked at the time of the primary investment decision:

"What am I getting out of it?"

"What am I putting into it?"

The answers to these questions are extremely important since people will only stay involved if they continue to find that the benefits are greater than the costs.

So, it's up to you to keep analyzing the costs and the benefits of your ongoing programs so people will want to stay involved and committed.

conclusion

Finally ... remember this. It isn't enough for you to be aware of the program's benefits. You've got to spread the word. Let people know about what your program has to offer them so they'll want to get involved. The accompanying booklet, *Appeals: An Extension Programming Tool*, can give you pointers about publicizing your programs.

Of course all this takes a lot of time and energy on your part, but think of the alternatives:

- ... at the very least people just won't get involved.
- ...at the very worst people will try to get involved, but may waste so much time and energy that they'll never want to participate in anything again.

It makes sense to spend the extra time and energy needed to analyze costs and benefits, because such an effort will result in improved programming and a real commitment on the part of the participants.

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