

Tips to Go: Designing and Evaluating Community Outreach Education

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What Is?

There is little research available on delivering effective educational programs for adults outside of traditional learning environments, particularly lower-income, less educated, and other underserved populations. Traditionally community adult education workshops may not fit the needs of today's single parent and two-parent working families. Even less research exists on the evaluation of alternative delivery methods.

Who am I trying to reach....

According to the U.S. Census Bureau:

- 34% of Richland County households earn less than \$25,000/year;
- 18% of Richland County residents do not have a high school diploma while 41% are high school or equivalency graduates with no higher education;
- 70% of Richland County households have all parents in the family in the labor force.

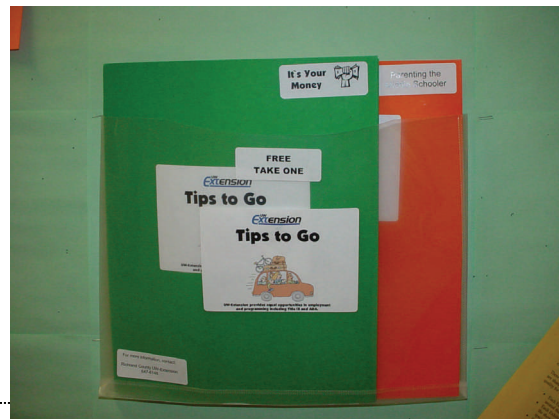
.... and how do they prefer to learn?

- 37% of rural households and 47% of households with annual incomes under \$30,000 report that they do not use the internet;
- 60% of individuals with less than a high school degree and 36% of high school graduates report they do not use the internet (Pew Internet and American Life Project, April 2006).
- 70% of lower-income individuals and 68% of less educated individuals prefer to receive financial information through pamphlets or booklets (Rhine and Toussaint-Comeau, 2002).

SOTL Questions

What are practical applications for use of independent study materials in reaching the general public and traditionally underserved audiences?

How does one evaluate the impact of this independent study method?



Response

Tips to Go was designed by a team of UW-Extension Family Living Educators as a method for reaching underserved clientele of varying income, literacy, and education levels with research-based information on priority topics.

Tips to Go:

- Is a free educational packet containing both an audiocassette and CD 45-minutes in length along with written resources
- Current releases include *"It's Your Money"* (Olive) and *"Parenting Your Middle-schooler"* (Schaaf, Crawford County UW-Extension)
- Was distributed through community partners and in public locations throughout four counties in southern Wisconsin in 2006-2007

Results

Pilot evaluations:

- 11 evaluations returned out of 31 packets distributed (35%)
- *"Convenient way to learn."*
- *"Couldn't look at [the worksheets] when they were referred to because I was driving. I was motivated and curious enough to look at them later."*
- *"Will share with my mother." ↔ "My kids listened with me."*

Broad release evaluations:

- 21 pre-paid feedback postcards returned out of 760 packets distributed (<3%)
- 16 out of 21 reported that they had already used a new skill learned through the independent study materials
 - *"Set aside emergency fund."*
 - *"Called 888-5-OPT-OUT to stop receiving pre-approved credit cards."*
 - *"Not stepping in on all sibling fights."*

Also observed:

- Three individuals attended individual budget counseling sessions/ workshops through UW-Extension after picking up a financial packet; however, all three had also not returned the feedback postcard at that time.
- Packets placed in public locations (grocery store, mall, pharmacy, library, etc.) were taken by clientele within several days.
- Community partners requested additional packets for use with clientele and additional topics needed by their clientele.
- Use of incentives for returning the postcard evaluation did not appear to influence response rates.
- The feedback postcard and human subjects protection was simplified for half of the packets released, but does not appear to affect the return rate at this time.

The transtheoretical model of change exerts that people in the precontemplation stage of change rarely seek and use information. In the contemplation stage, people begin to acknowledge an issue and seek information and sources of help.

Future Plans

- Two additional topics to be released in 2007 by team members Metzenbauer and Ziebell.
- Add pilot evaluation question for clientele: *"When people pick up a packet, how will we know if it made a difference for them?"*
- Formalize evaluation survey for community partners distributing and using packets.
- Continue researching alternative delivery methods and their evaluation.

References

- Rhine, S. & Toussaint-Comeau, M. *Adult Preferences for the Delivery of Personal Finance Information*. Association for Financial Counseling and Planning Education, 2002.
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- Steele, S. *Evaluation and Self-Directed Learning*. 1992. In *Self-Directed Learning: Application and Research*, Long, H. (Ed.), (pp 327-327). Oklahoma Research Center for Continuing Professional and Higher Education.