



EXTENSIONNET

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“Managing change – building knowledge and skills” Further Followup

FORMS OF EVALUATION FOR AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION

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Review of Forms of Evaluation

The paper that I presented at the conference outlined the findings of a RIRDC sponsored Review of Evaluation in Agricultural Extension in Australia. The study was conceived in the context of an increase in the demand for material that could be used to train agricultural extension agents and other rural professionals in the field of program evaluation. Since then, Review has gone to RIRDC for possible publication.

For the Review, we collected and analysed over a 100 evaluation documents from rural extension centres, universities and agriculture departments in various states, and private consultants and individuals in Australia. We found that there are some very able and experienced evaluators active in the field of program evaluation in agriculture, and the case studies in the Review reflect the diversity and creativity in this field. However, during the course of the Review many extension agents and managers expressed a lack of knowledge, skills and confidence in this area. Also, we found that much of the existing evaluation practice in

extension is based around a few rather limited approaches and methods such as mail surveys and cost-benefit analysis, with little reference to developments and trends in program evaluation in other disciplines. Nevertheless, we did find strong indications that the range of approaches to evaluation in agricultural extension is expanding. A number of new and innovative evaluations are under way that are more formative and qualitative than has been the norm in the past.

While carrying out the Review we experienced some difficulty in finding well - documented examples of some types of program evaluation, such as formal systems of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) which operate throughout the life of a program. However, the published literature on M&E covers just one part of the lived experience: only the information that authors choose to write about comes into the public domain; other potentially valuable information often remains unrecorded and hidden. It could well be that practitioners do not fully realise the



Jessica Dart, Co Host of the Email Group Exteval

value of their experiences for others in similar situations.

Patton (1993) identifies the lack of evaluation as a frequent weakness of extension activities, and Woods et al, (1993) stress that key future strategies for rural extension workers include regular monitoring and evaluation of extension programs. So, a key lesson from the paper is that we need to improve our on-going systems of M&E for extension programs and document these experiences so that others can learn from them. In fact, a large proportion of the evaluation documents that we analysed were

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Conference Proceedings Available – see page 10

APEN'S COMING OF AGE



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Natural Resources
and Environment

- AGRICULTURE
- RESOURCES
- CONSERVATION
- LAND MANAGEMENT


Natural Resources and Environment (NRE) and previously Agriculture Victoria, has proudly sponsored APEN since its inception.

As a fledgling organisation, APEN needed support to achieve its goals as a professional association; goals which were then, as they are now, complementary to those of the Department. The relevance of APEN to NRE and to extension in Victoria is reflected in the active membership by many NRE staff and the early formation of APEN chapters in this state (Melbourne, Gippsland, Western Victoria and the NE Victoria-Riverina). However, the most compelling reason for NRE's on-going support for APEN is that effective extension is vital to enable us to achieve our outcomes for Government.

Outcomes of increased productivity and sustainable resource use are dependent on influencing the behavior of the people who manage those resources. Extension has its impact through helping people to develop new skills, knowledge and confidence, to adopt relevant technology and practices, and to develop as individuals and communities. To do this, the "tool box" available to modern extension workers needs to include much more than it did in the past. Gone are the days of the sole operator, equipped with technical expertise, a car and a telephone, whose main "tools" were farm visits, field days and the local press to achieve the desired results. Today, the complex economic and environmental issues facing rural Australia mean that those in extension work in teams and require skills in group facilitation, adult learning techniques, market research, and more. They must have an understanding of the whole system, the rural community and sustainability.

The change agents need to continually respond to change, to adapt and be more innovative. For example, the push for increasing accountability and continuous improvement means that skills in program evaluation are now a must for extension. The trend towards fewer, bigger projects (NRE delivers outcomes for government by investing in major projects) means there is more likelihood of extension and research teams being integrated to achieve desired results. For the same reason, there is more opportunity for public and private sector extension people to work closely together towards common objectives.

APEN has now "come of age" as a professional network. It has a sound membership base, has organised successful national and international conferences and is continuing to deliver benefits to its members. APEN provides a vehicle for extension professionals to share experiences and continue to refine their understanding and skills.

I wish APEN continued success in extending the horizons of the change agent. 

From the Editor

Elwin Turnbull, University of Western Sydney, Hawkesbury.

In this edition some of the more popular sessions at the conference have been followed up by the presenters to let us know what happened at the conference and some of the follow up activities which have commenced. There has been such a good response to my request for follow up comments that there was no space for reporting on the conference evaluation in any detail. Suffice to say the conference was formally evaluated and 174 delegates (60%) completed the survey. The responses were generally highly complimentary about the success of the conference. Some constructive suggestions were made to help future organisers. The conference organising committee has a written report. If you are interested in the detail of the evaluation please contact Peter Davies or myself.

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found to be conducted when the programs were well established, or when they were already finished. The clients of the program (usually farmers) were not generally involved in developing the indicators for the evaluation. The most common aim of evaluation was to provide a report to justify spending and to understand whether the stated objectives of the program had been met.

I personally believe that we can benefit more from evaluations that are conducted when the program is still progressing, so that the findings can be used to improve programs as well as to *prove* that outcomes have been met. I also advocate evaluation that involves the field staff and farmers in deciding what gets measured in the evaluation.

E-mail Discussion Group Exteval

One of the things that came up during discussion at the conference was the need to form a forum to debate various approaches to evaluation and to support each other in evaluating extension programs in a meaningful way. Consequently I have set up an E-mail listserver called exteval for this purpose. To subscribe to EXTEVAL, send an e-mail message to Mailserv@unimelb.edu.au with the following in the message:

Subscribe exteval {your name}

To send a message to all the people currently subscribed to this list, just send mail to:

exteval@unimelb.edu.au

This discussion group is aimed at people who are interested in how to evaluate agricultural extension programs. It is aimed at extension in Australia, but anyone is welcome to join. The group is hosted by myself in conjunction with Bruce Frank from the School of Natural & Rural Systems Management, at the University of Queensland. The idea

to set up this discussion group was conceived at the Australasian evaluation conference in Adelaide (1997) and a further meeting was held at the APEN conference Albury in November 1997.

The Aims of the Email Group Exteval are:

- To give mutual support to each other to help evaluate projects and programs in agricultural extension
- To ask questions about appropriate approaches and methods of evaluation for particular contexts and to give advice to each other.
- To alert group members of new or relevant literature concerning evaluation of extension
- To alert group members to training opportunities in evaluation appropriate for extension programs

Future Proposals

Since the APEN conference I have been planning to start testing some innovative forms of participatory evaluation. I also now part an evaluation pilot team in the Victorian Department of Natural Resources and Environment (Primary Industries), and we are busy working with some of the major projects in further developing their evaluation plans. At the next APEN conference I hope to present some of these novel approaches to evaluation, which by then should have been tried and tested!

References

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ALBURY '97 – MAKING MEMORIES (Reflections from a Yank)

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It has been four months since I had the opportunity of joining many of you at the 2nd Australasia Pacific Conference in Albury. I enjoyed meeting and interacting with the extension staff from throughout the country and region. We do not have similar conferences in California or the US, so it was a new experience for me. I saw some real energy and enthusiasm about being an extension professional in the many exchanges of ideas and information. When I received a request to prepare a short abstract of my presentation at the APEN Conference, 'A Contrast of the Australian and California Extension and Technology Transfer Processes', I readily accepted. In a relatively short space, I will review my paper and identify how I am attempting to use some of the ideas I learned down under to address issues in California extension. Interested readers who may want to discuss some aspect in greater detail may contact the author at mmurray@ucdavis.edu.

The paper broadly generalized individual Australian and California's extension programs. The organizational missions or objectives were defined and characterized. The University of California extension program has three major characteristics: it is delivered by academic staff through the Land Grant College, which anchors it firmly to a University research base; the extension programs are delivered through local county offices and receive financial