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ABSTRACT

This manual is designed to introduce extension workers to needs assessment theory and techniques in an applied context and to serve as a tool for planning and implementing county-level assessments of youths' needs for extension education (including 4-H programs). First, the following steps in the program planning process are explained: identify issues, determine needs, set goals and objectives, assess resources, form a plan, implement the plan, and evaluate results. Selected aspects of the needs assessment process are examined (including critical questions for needs assessments, examples of target groups and informants, reasons for conducting/not conducting needs assessments, and strategies). The following office techniques for conducting needs assessments are discussed and illustrated with sample forms/instruments: needs sheet/wall chart, resource inventories, review of office records, futures wheel, and reflective listening. The roles of the following data/data collection instruments in assessing needs are described: social indicators, written surveys, phone surveys, the nominal group process, county forums, focus group interviews, and brainstorming. Concluding the manual are a summary of Pennsylvania county youth needs assessments conducted during 1987-91 and lists of the following: other needs assessment techniques, common misuses of the needs assessment techniques described, and benefits of county advisory committees. (Contains 21 references.) (MN)

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Preface

This notebook was originally prepared and distributed in a Penn State Cooperative Extension Inservice Workshop held March 14-15, 1988, in State College. A copy of the notebook also was provided to those extension offices not represented at the workshop. Agents planned and executed needs assessments in their counties during the next three years, using the original notebook as a shelf reference.

An annual evaluation of the county needs assessments was conducted by Arlen Etling, assistant professor of agricultural and extension education with 4-H faculty responsibilities. A four-year summary of those evaluation efforts is included at the end of this notebook. The recommendations in that report may be of particular interest to extension professionals who are contemplating an assessment of the needs of youth and other clients in their counties.

The purposes of the original notebook and of this revised version were, and still are, (1) to introduce extension workers to needs assessment theory and techniques in a practical, applied context and (2) to provide a shelf reference for planning and implementing county level assessments of the needs of youth.

Arlen Etling

August, 1993

Acknowledgements

Many individuals contributed to this needs assessment notebook.

Information on social indicators was provided by Anne Ishler.

Anne Heinsohn and Thomas Maloney wrote the section on written surveys.

Information on conducting phone surveys was developed by Nancy Ellen Kiernan.

The community forum information comes from a handbook written by William Gillis and Sand-a Shearer.

Harold Ott provided the handouts on county program development committees,

Each of these contributors is sincerely appreciated.

Instruments

Throughout this notebook are ready-to-use instruments which can be duplicated or modified. Each instrument is identified as such at the top of the page.

PROGRAM PLANNING

Before understanding needs assessment we need to understand the overall process of program planning of which needs assessment is one step. The program planning process is an organized approach for moving from ideas to action. The essential steps in this process follow:

IDENTIFY ISSUES

Find out what is on people's minds-their concerns, needs and wants. Write these issues down, checking with the person who suggested each one for clarification. Include as many people as possible in this step. Take plenty of time to be certain that everyone has been encouraged to express all concerns. Several sessions and more than one technique may be needed to carry out this step.

Techniques which may be used to identify the issues include brainstorming, the county forum, a community survey, focus group, and program evaluation. These techniques must be used correctly to be effective.

This guide provides an overview of the process which extension agents and specialists use to assist communities with a variety of problems and opportunities. While some communities may have the resources to complete all of the steps discussed here, this guide is intended for use with extension assistance, not as an alternative to that assistance.

DETERMINE NEEDS

Now separate needs from wants. People who are emotionally involved in an issue may confuse their own "wants" with community "needs." Sort out issues that are important issues. Determine which is most important, second in importance, third, and so on. Then decide the correct sequence for attacking the top priorities.

In most cases, the nominal group process is the best technique for setting priorities. Again, involve as many people as possible. At least be certain that all viewpoints are represented in the group which is setting priorities.

SET GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Determine what needs to be done about each priority and state that as a goal. Then break the goal down into more specific objectives.

Here is an example of how this worked in one community.

Issue—Tourist accommodations are inadequate.

Goal—Provide more tourist accommodations.

Objectives—

1. By June 1, a local sales team will be formed by the town.
2. By December 31, a contract will be signed between the Town Council and the motel chain specifying agreements to construct a motel.

A goal is a general statement of intent. The objectives are challenging, realistic, specific, measurable, simple, and not too confining.

ASSESS RESOURCES

What human financial, and physical resources are available to carry out the objectives? If the resources are inadequate, for any reason, then the objectives may need to be rewritten to make them more realistic.

Techniques which may help assess resources include a local resource inventory, public meeting, or discussions with individuals who are aware of the area, state, and federal resources. Do not overlook local or outside resources.

FORM A PLAN

Once the available resources are in line with the objectives, a plan should be written. People involved will want to discuss alternative strategies for meeting the objectives. The plan represents the best alternative.

The objectives as well as activities for meeting the objectives should be included in the plan. The plan should specify individuals' responsibilities and a time by which each activity will be completed. The plan coordinates all of the resources so the overall goal is accomplished logically and efficiently.

In delegating responsibilities, keep in mind that some people are willing to help plan, some will legitimize, some will provide resources, and some will be workers. If planners are called on to be workers, they may rebel and fail to deliver. Using people in the wrong roles is a common mistake. Be sure people are committed to do specifically what the plan requires of them.

IMPLEMENT THE PLAN

Constantly refer to the written plan to guide the work.

Techniques needed at this point include effective communication, conflict resolution, group dynamics, and publicity. If the plan has been carefully written, individuals who have specific responsibilities will meet those responsibilities at the right time.

Some people lack some of the critical skills or at least the confidence to use them. In that case, the agent should organize training to develop necessary skills before plunging ahead.

EVALUATE RESULTS

Encourage feedback from everyone who is involved. As people implement the plan, they will invariably run into snags. Everything cannot be anticipated in the plan. At this point, it may be desirable to adjust the plan to make it more realistic before proceeding. Maintain an attitude of flexibility which will enable minor adjustments or, if necessary, a major adjustment where the entire plan must be rewritten due to a major snag.

When you think the project is completed, check the objectives to be certain nothing has been overlooked. You may want an outsider to conduct a formal evaluation in some cases. You will at least want to record what you did, right or wrong, to improve chances of success on future projects.

The process described above is sequential. Step three cannot be accomplished until steps one and two have been done. However, once you get into step three, it may change your thinking about steps one and two. When you backtrack to make changes, follow the effects of those changes through each succeeding step.

In any educational program, readiness is an issue. The best plan will have little chance of success if people aren't ready for it.

Finally, work closely with other educators in your area. Cooperation with other agencies takes some time but in the long run it can save a lot of time and effort.

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NEEDS ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

NEEDS ASSESSMENT: A DEFINITION

The systematic process for documenting relevant needs

THREE CRITICAL QUESTIONS FOR NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Who needs What according to Whom?

"Who" refers to the target group of clients (youth or adults).

"What" refers to their needs.

"Whom" refers to informants who have reason to know the target group's needs.

EXAMPLES OF TARGET GROUPS AND INFORMANTS

Target groups	*Informants*
4-H Youth	me
new	4-Hers
junior	non 4-H youth
senior	parents
urban	leaders
future	agents
prospective members	specialists
dropouts from 4-H	agencies
families	donors
volunteers	critics
staff	

These lists will need to be expanded as you consider the possibilities and then reduced as you choose priorities.

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WHY DO NEEDS ASSESSMENT?

1. *Necessary part of program planning*

   We need to know where we are going before we can plan how to get there.

2. *A principle of democracy*

   People should be involved in decisions that affect them. They should help plan programs where they are expected to be participants. People are not as willing to do the legwork if they are not also involved in the planning.

3. *Motivation*

   Theories tell us we should appeal to individuals' basic needs and interests.

4. *Accountability*

   Increasing demands are being placed on cooperative extension on all levels by our many publics.

5. *Support*

   Program support depends on how well we meet documented needs in the community. We need support from members, parents, leaders, decision-makers, donors, other organizations in the community, and others.

6. *Anticipation of conflicts*

   This is done by understanding needs.

7. *Needs change*

   We can never assume that we have the final word on peoples' needs.

8. *Complex society*

   As societies become more complex, people tend to depend more on others to meet their needs.

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WHY NOT TO DO NEEDS ASSESSMENT?

Here are some commonly heard arguments concerning why not to do an assessment of needs.

Argument	*Caution*
1. Already overloaded	Needs assessment sets priorities which can help you out of the activity trap.
2. Time consuming	In the long run, needs assessment will save time.
3. Already know my clients' needs	A very dangerous assumption. How about potential clients that are not served now?
4. Might add additional clients	Maybe the time is right to add new clientele and change emphasis.
5. Can't see the benefits	See previous page
6. Do not know how to assess needs	Read on.

After considering costs and benefits, many agents will conclude that they should do needs assessment. Other agents may conclude that they should not do needs assessment. If you are convinced that costs outweigh benefits, then you should probably wait.

STRATEGY

Perhaps the key question in doing needs assessment is "what combination of techniques will reveal the needs of the target groups?"

Target groups whose needs might be assessed in Pennsylvania 4-H include current 4-H youth, prospective members, dropouts, parents, volunteer leaders, and staff who coordinate the program. Informants might include those same target groups plus 4-H donors, community agencies that work with 4-H aged youth, and critics of the 4-H program.

The strategy will be to use some combination of social indicators, existing records, interviews, focus groups, nominal group process, evaluations, mailed questionnaires, and research studies to identify needs. These techniques should be repeated periodically to update information on needs. Results should be widely disseminated to increase awareness and promote discussion of the needs identified.

After conducting needs assessments for four years, a recommended strategy for assessing needs of youth emerged. See recommendation number six of the Summary of Pennsylvania County Youth Needs Assessments at the back of this publication.

GET HOOKED!! DO NEEDS ASSESSMENT!!

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OFFICE TECHNIQUES

Several techniques for needs assessment include:

- needs sheet/wall chart
- resource inventories
- review of office records
- futures wheel
- reflective listening

Office techniques can supplement information on needs collected by more structured techniques such as surveys, forums, and the nominal group process. They can help agents to think of needs assessment as a continuous process, not just a one-shot event.

Office techniques work because simplicity is their greatest advantage. They can be done anytime without extensive planning and organization. They need not involve other people, except reflective listening.

Guidelines (rules) for using office techniques

- Decide which technique(s) you will use.
- Prepare a sheet of paper for recording needs (see accompanying example).
- Keep the sheet handy and visible so you don't forget about it.
- Use it regularly! Record needs weekly, after an activity or meeting, and after visits with people who mention needs.

Examples (next pages)

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NEEDS SHEET

Who	Needs what	According to whom

Note: This can be made into a wall chart by using newsprint or poster board.

RESOURCE INVENTORIES

Resource inventories describe resources (people, skills, equipment, services, facilities, funds, interests) that are available to county extension. These inventories reveal gaps in that same list of resources. The inventory may reveal underutilized resources, and may also help extension avoid launching programs where there is already a good deal of competition.

Caution: The resource inventory alone can not identify needs. However it will help agents to ask questions which will reveal needs.

On succeeding pages are examples of resource inventories:

- Notebook Inventory Form
- Inventory Wall Chart
- Inventory Worksheet for Committees
- 4-H Parent Interest List
- County 4-H Program
- Futures Wheel
- Reflective listening
- Review of Office Records

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NOTEBOOK INVENTORY FORM

Name of Individual or organization: ______________________ Updated: ________

Who to contact: ______________________ Phone: ______________________

Address: ______________________

Resources available: ______________________

People: ______________________

Name	Skills	Equipment	Interests

Facilities: ______________________

Supplies: ______________________

Services: ______________________

Funds: ______________________

Others: ______________________

____

What do we do for them: ______________________

Comments: ______________________

____

____

____

INVENTORY WALL CHART

Organization	*Volunteers*	*Funds*	*Equipment*	*Supplies*	*Facilities*	*Expertise*	*Other*

INVENTORY WORKSHEET FOR COMMITTEES

Project or activity: ______________________________

What do we need?	*Who has it?*	*How do we get it?*				*Contact*
		Ask	*Trade*	*Buy*	*Other*	

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4-H PARENT INTEREST LIST

Please check the things you are willing to do if your 4-H club needs them.

____ Encourage my son or daughter to participate in community activities as well as project 4-H club work, and we will participate as a family with the club as much as possible.

____ Lend kitchen, backyard, living room, or garage for an occasional meeting.

____ Help provide light refreshments. (Your son or daughter serves them. A committee helps with clean-up.)

____ Share a special interest or hobby with the group. Name the interest: ____________________

____ Help in a car pool for transportation to 4-H meetings.

____ Chaperone and/or provide transportation for a tour, picnic, party, or dinner.

____ Help telephone parents for last minute announcements.

____ Encourage my son or daughter to start and complete projects on time. I will take an active interest in him (her) .

____ Assist other members with 4-H projects...

List: ____________________

____

____

Hobbies: ____________________

Other volunteer interests:

____ County 4-H committees	____ 4-H tours	____ 4-H camping
____ Local 4-H committee	____ Exhibits	____ Assist at fair
____ Program planning	____ Fine arts	____ Clerical
____ Ticket sales	____ Hostessing	____ Registration

Name ____________________

Address ____________________

____________________ Phone ____________

Name of son or daughter ____________________

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COUNTY 4-H PROGRAM

Our 4–H program needs the following items. If you can provide them, or have any suggestions, please leave your name and number.

	I can provide it!		*I would accept the*
Needs	*name*	*phone*	*following payment*
Examples			
part-time secretary 5-hours/week			
a used refrigerator for fairgrounds			
babysitter for leaders' meetings			
someone to write news releases			
someone to design posters and banners			
use of portable generator for three days			

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REVIEW OF OFFICE RECORDS

In each county 4-H office are records which indicate the needs of 4-H members. Some examples of those records are:

Project enrollment forms

Project completion records

Leader enrollment forms

Minutes of advisory committee meetings

Minutes of other 4-H committee meetings

Evaluations of 4-H Activities

Participation in 4-H activities

Informal feedback from 4-H members and leaders via phone calls and one-on-one meetings

Inquiries about 4-H from nonmembers.

Project enrollment and completion records indicate high and low interest in projects as well as problems. Followup will be needed to determine the exact nature of problems (ie. wide differences between enrollment and completion for entomology may indicate problems with project leaders, materials, expectations of members, or lack of county event to support the project).

Leader enrollment forms may indicate oversupply or undersupply of project leaders. A high dropout rate for leaders indicates problems (unmet needs) which need further investigation.

Minutes, evaluations, feedback, and inquiries may indicate high or low interest in certain activities. They may also identify problems (needs).

FUTURES WHEEL

The futures wheel is another desktop technique which agents can use to organize their thinking about a particular group's needs. Let's assume that I, the 4-H agent, want to write down the needs of volunteer adult 4-H leaders.

In the center circle I would write a clear, concise question which, if answered, would give me a list of relevant needs. For 4-H leaders the question might be: what are the needs of volunteer project leaders in Snow Shoe County? I can abbreviate that to project leaders' needs (see example).

In the orbit around the center, I would list categories of needs such as personal, subject matter, running meetings, knowledge of 4-H at the county level, how to involve parents, motivating 4-Hers, etc. (see example).

In the next orbit I would break down the previous categories. For example: what are sources of subject matter for project leaders? Sources might include project materials, local experts, county agents, 4-H leaders in nearby clubs, library, books, and other such resources. (see example).

Each of these categories can be broken down even more. For library books, list specific books available for the projects offered.

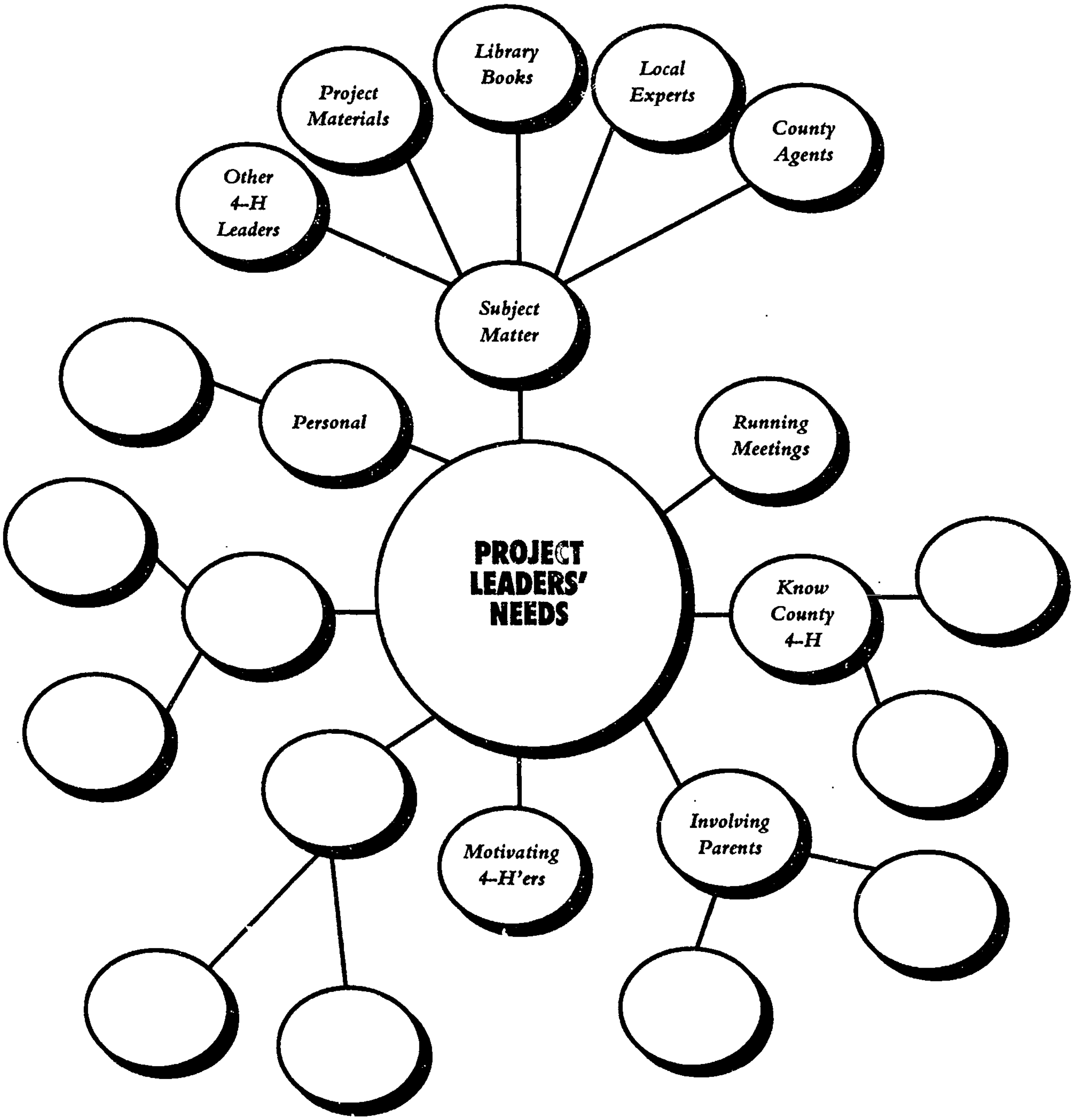
Two advantages of this futures wheel are:

1. It is a systematic way of attacking a fuzzy problem.

2. It gives you a written record of relationships.

The fuzzy problem is broken down until it becomes clear. The written record allows you to see many needs that otherwise are easily forgotten.

The futures wheel can also be used for small groups to identify needs of a target group. Put the wheel on a large piece of newsprint and fill in the center circle and a few of the circles in the next orbit. Then give one piece of newsprint to every group of three to five people to record their ideas.



REFLECTIVE LISTENING

Needs are constantly presenting themselves to us. We may listen and record these needs; or we may ignore/deflect/forget them. A technique that will help us to listen and record needs is reflective listening. It is used by counselors and interviewers who are trained to use it.

Reflective listening involves repeating information being offered by another person. By repeating we (1.) make sure we understand exactly what was said, and (2.) encourage the other person to keep talking. With a few stock phrases we can keep the other person talking indefinitely. Some examples:

> You say that... That is interesting, tell me more.
>
> You feel that... Is that right? What else?
>
> What do you mean by........?
>
> I am pleased to hear that. Tell me more.
>
> I am surprised to hear that. What else can you tell me?
>
> I am not clear on the part about....Could you explain that again?

While the other person is speaking, take notes. Note taking helps to keep your attention on the message. It helps control your emotions if you are being criticized. It gives you a permanent record of the conversation.

Cautions and Limitations

Each of these office techniques is limited to your own ideas or to those ideas of one other person. Office techniques can not replace larger and more formal efforts that are directed toward groups or mass audiences.

They can help you to record needs during the time between more formal needs assessments. They can help you to prepare for a larger effort; and they can help amplify and analyze the results of a group technique.

The greatest challenge in office techniques is the discipline needed to regularly record information about needs. Office techniques are easy to put off and they are easily forgotten (like new year's resolutions).

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SOCIAL INDICATORS

Social indicators are census data and other data compiled by government agencies and other organizations.

Sources of Data for Needs Assessment

Federal Resources

Bureau of the Census, Data User Services
(301) 763-5820

Philadelphia Office of Census Bureau
(215) 597-4920

State Resources

Pennsylvania State Data Center
Institute for State and Regional Affairs
Penn State, Capitol Campus
(717) 948-6336
(Network: 421-6336)

Pennsylvania State Health Data Center
Pennsylvania Department of Health
P.O. Box 90
Harrisburg, PA 17120
(717) 783-2548

Department of Agriculture
Pennsylvania Agricultural Statistics Service
2301 North Cameron Street
Harrisburg, PA 17110-9408
(717) 787-3904

Department of Labor and Industry
Office of Employment Security
Research and Statistics Division
Room 1225, Labor and Industry Building
Harrisburg, PA 17121

Department of Public Welfare
Interdepartmental Human Services
Planning Committee
Room 223, Health and Welfare Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Local Resources

Regional Planning Office
County Planning Office
Municipal Planning Office
Human Services Planning Office
Council for Human Services
Human Services Agencies
- Children and Youth
- Mental Health
- Office of Aging

Census Depository Libraries (see list)
Local library

Penn State Resources

Pattee Library, Documents Room
(Ask for Pennsylvania Census volumes at desk)

Publications

Federal

Data User News
Monthly Product Announcement
Census of Population and Housing Volumes
Census of Agriculture Volumes
County Business Patterns

State

State Data Center Newsletter
State Data Center Data Publications
Pennsylvania Abstract (SDC)
Pennsylvania Vital Statistics (SHDC)
County Planning Data Kit (DPW)
Civilian Labor Force Series (DL&I)
Crop and Livestock Summary (PDA)

List of Census Depository Libraries

Pennsylvania	
Allentown	Muhlenberg College Haas Library
Altoona	Altoona Public Library
Bethlehem	Lehigh University, Linderman Library
Blue Bell	Montgomery County Community College, Learning Resources Center Library
Carlisle	Dickinson College, Boyd Lee Spahr Library
Cheyney	Cheyney State College, Leslie Pinckney Hill Library
Collegeville	Ursinus College, Myria Library
Doylestown	Bucks County Free Library, Center County Library
East Stroudsburg	East Stroudsburg State College, Kemp Library
Erie	Erie Public Library
Greenville	Thiel College, Langenheim Memorial Library
Harrisburg	State Library of Pennsylvania
Haverford	Haverford College Library
Hazleton	Hazleton Area Public Library
Indiana	Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Rhodes R. Stabley Library
Johnstown	Cambria Public Library
Lancaster	Franklin and Marshall College, Fackenthal Library
Lewisburg	Bucknell University, Ellen Clarke Bertrand Library
Mansfield	Mansfield State College Library
Meadville	Allegheny College, Reis Library
Millersville	Millersville State College, Ganser Library
Monessen	Monessen Public Library
New Castle	New Castle Free Public Library
Newtown	Bucks County Community College Library
Norristown	Montgomery County - Norristown Public Library
Philadelphia	Drexel University Library
	Free Library of Philadelphia
	St. Joseph's College Library
	Temple University, Samuel Paley Library
	U.S. Court of Appeals, Third Circuit
	University of Pennsylvania, Biddle Law Library
	University of Pennsylvania Library
Pittsburgh	Bureau of Mines, Pittsburgh Research Center Library
	Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, Allegheny Regional Branch
	Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh
	La Roche College, John J. Wright Library
	University of Pittsburgh, Hillman Library
Pottsville	Pottsville Free Public Library
Reading	Reading Public Library
Scranton	Scranton Public Library
Shippensburg	Shippensburg State College, Ezra Lehman Memorial Library
Slippery Rock	Slippery Rock State College, Maltby Library
Swarthmore	Swarthmore College Library
University Park	The Pennsylvania State University Library
Villanova	Villanova University, School of Law Library
Warren	Warren Library Association, Warren Public Library
Washington	Washington and Jefferson College, Memorial Library
Waynesburg	Waynesburg College Library
West Chester	West Chester State College, Francis Harvey Green Library
Wilkes-Barre	King's College, Corgan Library
Williamsport	Lycoming College Library
York	York Junior College Library
Youngwood	Westmoreland County Community College, Learning Center

WRITTEN SURVEYS

WHAT ARE WRITTEN SURVEYS?

A written survey is one of several techniques used to collect information. Written surveys are often mailed, but they may also be handed out at meetings or at other public places.

Typically, written surveys are mailed out and then mailed back. They are sometimes handed out at a meeting and then mailed back. Opportunities often exist where written surveys can be handed out at malls, fairs, exhibits, libraries, or grocery stores, and then turned in there or mailed back. Another method is to collect names and addresses of those who are interested in participating in 4-H to create a pool of respondents (ie at the mall, fair, grocery store, etc.). Then mail them out with a mail return envelope. Also, written surveys can be included as part of a newsletter and then mailed back.

WHY DO WRITTEN SURVEYS WORK?

Research points out that mail surveys work because they are a relatively easy, quick, and inexpensive method of reaching large numbers of people, especially when compared to interviews. Costs include printing, postage, labels, and stuffing. Mail surveys are especially appropriate when:

—visuals are needed.

—long lists will be included.

—respondent needs to think about or look up something.

—privacy is necessary or helpful.

—anyone in the household can provide the answers.

—questions can be answered in any order.

HOW CAN WRITTEN SURVEYS HELP EXTENSION AGENTS IN DOING NEEDS ASSESSMENT?

Written surveys can help extension agents reach nonextension audiences. They allow extension agents to reach large numbers of respondents in a short time, as opposed to interviews and phone surveys.

Rules (guidelines) for written surveys

Seek only required information.

Ask the question that will provide the desired information.

Do not use the response on one question to infer the response to another unasked question.

Keep the questions simple.

Use language that is familiar to the respondents, ie - no jargon.

Pose only one question in an item.

Keep the questionnaire as short as possible.

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HOW TO USE WRITTEN SURVEYS

Before developing a questionnaire, think through:

—what information is desired.

—why the information is desired.

—what is the intended use of the information.

Next, determine:

—what questions to ask (purpose of the questionnaire).

—how to ask these questions (developing questionnaire items).

With mail questionnaires, it is important to ask appropriate questions. Questions need to be phrased correctly, both semantically and sensitively. Appropriate response options must be provided.

When devising survey questionnaires, ask yourself these four questions.

1. Is this a question that can be orally asked exactly the way that it is written?
2. Is this a question that will mean the same thing to everyone?
3. Is this a question that the respondents can answer?
4. Is this a question that the respondents will be willing to answer?

Be careful in the choice of words for the survey. Ask yourself these five questions.

1. Will the words be uniformly understood by everyone?
2. Will the reader understand the acronyms or abbreviations?
3. Is the question phrased vaguely or are some words open to interpretation?
4. Do questions request overly precise or detailed information?
5. Does the survey contain "loaded" or sensitive questions?

CAUTIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Mail surveys have several limitations.

— Data collection can take up to seven weeks with follow-up.

— Response rates will likely be quite low unless persistent follow-up is done (letters, post cards, calls).

— There is little control over completeness of answers. Respondents can leave some answers blank.

— Those who reply may not be "typical" participants. You may hear from those who represent "extremes."

— Some respondents may feel that it is an imposition to be asked to fill in something and mail it back.

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PARENT SURVEY

Does your child participate in after-school activities? (Check as many as apply)

_____ private lessons such as dance, music, etc.
_____ school sports
_____ community sports such as soccer, baseball
_____ church group
_____ Scouts
_____ other, write in activity ______________________________
_____ none

Comments: ______________________________

____

____

How often does your child attend out-of-school activities?

(check frequency)

_____ once a week
_____ once a month
_____ twice a week
_____ twice a month
_____ other, write in activity ______________________________

Comments: ______________________________

____

To what extent are you satisfied with the out-of-school activities available to your child? (check one)

_____ very satisfied
_____ somewhat dissatisfied
_____ somewhat satisfied
_____ very dissatisfied
_____ uncertain

Comments: ______________________________

____

____

Would you like your child to participate in a 4-H progra n or club? (check one)

_____ during school hours
_____ after school and at school
_____ after school and within walking distance
_____ evening
_____ Saturday
_____ other, write in ______________________________

Comments: ______________________________

____

____

What kind of program would you like for your child? Select three and rank them in order 1, 2, 3.

(Note: This question allows an opportunity to list projects or activities that you wish to promote.)

_____ exploring nature

_____ exploring science

_____ learning to cook

_____ learning to care for pets

_____ learning to sew

_____ learning to care for younger children

_____ participating in recreational games

_____ learning about plants and gardening

_____ other write in ______________________________

Comments: ______________________________

____

After school does your child usually do one of the following? (circle one number)

go home	1
stay at school	2
go to sitter	3
go to a relative's home	4
go to a day-care program	5
____________________	6

How many children do you have? (check one)

_____ 1

_____ 2

_____ 3

_____ 4

_____ 5 or more

What are their ages?

_____ under 8 years

_____ 8 to 10 years

_____ 11 to 13 years

_____ other write in ______________________________

Please return this survey to ____________________ by _____ , 1994

A SURVEY OF YOUTH NEEDS IN OUR COUNTY

What are the needs of youth (aged 8-19) in this county? Please rate the following needs and add any needs which are not listed.

	Extremely important need	*Needed, but not urgent*	*Not a need*
1 Job opportunities career guidance	______	______	______
2 Avoiding drug/alcohol abuse	______	______	______
3 Availability of recreational facilities and activities	______	______	______
4 Strengthening families to provide role models and avoid violence	______	______	______
5 Education on sex, pregnancy, parenthood, AIDS	______	______	______
6 Improving self-esteem and self-motivation to avoid stress or suicide	______	______	______
7 Skills in leadership, citizenship	______	______	______
8 Communications skills to deal with peers and adults	______	______	______
9 Transportation	______	______	______
10 Enriching the quality and offerings of local schools	______	______	______
11 Improving child-care services and facilities	______	______	______
12 Goal setting	______	______	______
13 Coping with gangs and crime	______	______	______
14 Support groups for youth	______	______	______
15 Expanding 4-H programs (explain)	______	______	______
______________________________			
16 Improving 4-H programs			
a Funding for 4-H programs	______	______	______
b Recruitment of volunteers	______	______	______
c Recruitment of youth	______	______	______
d Retention of youth members	______	______	______
e Retention of volunteers	______	______	______
f More school enrichment	______	______	______
g Handling over-competitive families	______	______	______
h Better leader training	______	______	______
i Eliminate activities which are detrimental (explain)	______	______	______

____

17. Other ______________________________

____

Please return this survey to ______________________ *by* ____ *, 1994*

PHONE SURVEYS

Advantages

— save time
— increase volunteer knowledge of topic
— achieve high response rates
— excellent for
  • simply stated questions
  • answer categories of three or four
— decrease cost with
  • volunteer time
  • volunteer phones
— easy to sample

Disadvantages

— increase costs with
  • paid-for labor
  • telephone charges
— volunteer drop out
— volunteer need training to avoid bias
— avoid if questions are open ended
— avoid if respondent needs records or needs to ponder
— interviewers need practice to get through gate keepers (i.e. secretaries)
— frustration at number of dials due to:
  • not at home
  • businesses
  • nonresidents
  • not in service

Principles of Interviewing

— avoid a test or quiz approach
— do not be chatty
— be conversational
— be firm, act like you know what you're doing
— maintain confidentiality
— explain nature of study
— ask for cooperation
— inform respondents that they can refuse
— be consistent
  • maintain same order of questions each time
  • read introduction and sample questions/answers
  • ask every question
— know what to say if respondent
  • has questions about study
  • doesn't understand question
  • gives an irrelevant answer
  • can't decide between two answers
  • "doesn't know"
— maintain neutrality
  • never suggest answers
  • never agree or disagree
— be prepared for
  • busy people, older people
  • the chatty person
  • respondents who want your opinion
  • the respondent who has more ideas

A SAMPLE INTRODUCTION FOR TELEPHONE SURVEYS

Penn State is conducting a survey of educational leaders across the state to find out about various aspects of the 4-H program in Pennsylvania. The information will be used by Penn State faculty and staff to address the 4-H program in the next four years.

Your name was suggested by an advisory group of 4-H personnel because of your long-standing interest in youth programs. All responses are confidential. The interview should take just a few minutes. You may ask questions at any time, and you may refuse to answer a question if you wish. Okay?

Let me turn on the tape recorder.

The first question:

For Volunteers

I certify that this is a complete and honest interview taken in accordance with my instructions. Furthermore, I promise to maintain the responses in strictest confidentiality.

Signed: ______________________________

Date: ______________________________

A PHONE SURVEY

Hello. This is (interviewer's name), calling for Penn State and cooperative extension in Montour, Northumberland, Snyder, and Union counties. We're conducting a telephone survey to find out what people in these four counties feel are some of the important issues facing them today. The information will be used to plan extension education programs in these counties over the next five years.

Your number was selected randomly, and your responses will be confidential. The interview should take just a few minutes. Feel free to ask questions at any time, and you may withhold a response to any item if you wish. Okay?

(Read slowly so people can concentrate on what you're saying)

1. First, I would like to ask how you feel about Montour, Northumberland, Snyder, and Union counties as a place to live. Do you consider them: (Read alternative responses)

   1. very desirable
   2. somewhat desirable
   3. somewhat undesirable
   9. (refused to answer)

2. The next area is about youth issues. For each topic I read, tell me if you feel it is (1) an extremely important need of youth (9 to 19 years old), or (2) needed but not urgent, or (3) not a need.

   a. job opportunities and career guidance
   b. avoiding drug/alcohol abuse
   c. availability of recreational facilities and activities
   d. strengthening families to provide role models and avoid violence
   e. education on sex, pregnancy, parenthood, AIDS
   f. improving self-esteem and self-motivation to avoid stress and suicide
   g. skills in leadership, citizenship
   h. communication skills to deal with peers and adults
   i. transportation availability
   j. enriching the quality and offerings of local schools
   k. improving child-care services and facilities
   l. goal setting
   m. coping with gangs and crime
   n. support groups for youth
   o. expanded 4-H programs
   p. improved 4-H programs
   q. other

Finally, we'd like to know just a few things about who we reached so we can determine if our sample is representative of the multi-county area: Montour, Northumberland, Snyder, and Union

3. First, are you:

   1. male
   2. female
   9. (refused to answer)

4. Second, would you mind telling us what age category you're in? Are you:

   1. under 20 years
   2. between 20 to 34 years
   3. between 35 to 54 years
   4. between 55 to 74 years
   5. 75 years or over
   9. (refused to answer)

Thank you for participating in the Multi-County Area Community Needs Assessment. Your answers will help us plan programs for the area for the next five years.

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THE NOMINAL GROUP PROCESS

WHAT IS THE NOMINAL GROUP PROCESS?

The nominal group process is a structured process which allows people to express their "individual priorities" in the beginning. Then the process moves from those individual priorities to "group priorities." If those present will agree to follow a few simple yet firm rules, the process can be extremely effective—even when disagreement and controversy are present. The nominal group process takes about two hours for seven basic steps (less for small groups).

HOW CAN THE NOMINAL GROUP PROCESS HELP EXTENSION AGENTS IN DOING NEEDS ASSESSMENT?

Nominal group process provides a great structure for managing large groups. With nominal group process, an agent can get lots of ideas face-to-face at one meeting, and still end up with a manageable list of priorities at the end.

WHY DOES THE NOMINAL GROUP PROCESS WORK?

Nominal group process is a proven technique devised by management experts to obtain effective individual participation to identify needs, goals, and priorities. Nominal group process maximizes the creativity and active input of each participant, and produces more and higher quality suggestions than ordinary group discussion. It also discourages any single speaker or topic from dominating the meeting.

WHAT ARE THE RULES OF THE NOMINAL GROUP PROCESS?

The leader of the nominal group process must:

- Be extremely well-prepared and well organized
- State the task very clearly and write it down for all to see
- Complete each step as described below without any variation which can weaken the process
- Hold the group to the time schedule (some flexibility is allowed here)
- Be firm yet fair throughout

HOW TO USE NOMINAL GROUP PROCESS

Preparation

The meeting should be held in a comfortable room, large enough to hold the expected number of participants in such a manner that tables seating 5 to 8 persons can be spaced adequately for independent group activity.

There should be one group leader/recorder assigned to each table, and an overall coordinator for the meeting. The following supplies are also needed for each table: a broad felt tip marking pen, masking tape, one large pad of newsprint, four or five 5 x 8 cards per person, and pencils. An easel with a board is handy, but not essential.

Introduction

The leader requests from the assembly complete cooperation and commitment to the seriousness of the task at hand. Explain that some of the rules for this activity may not seem important at the time. However, each is necessary and has a purpose which should become clear by the end of the process. It should be made very clear whether the meeting is problem-oriented, or solution-oriented, and that it is designed strictly for the purpose of identifying needs or goals and priorities. Each group should be assigned an identification number or letter.

Step 1: Nominal group activity (10 minutes)

The coordinator states the task in brief, precise terms, and writes it on a blackboard or large sheet of paper for all in the room to see. (Experience suggests that the correct wording of the problem, question, or task is crucial to obtain the focused response desired of participants. Before the meeting, the organizers or program staff should determine precisely what kind of information is to be requested of the participants.)

Group leaders distribute the 5 x 8 cards to the persons at their tables. Each participant is asked to write suggestions and ideas regarding the task in short words or phrases. Remind everyone that there are no right or wrong answers. Individuals must work in silence and alone. Be strict about it—in a nice way.

Step 2: Round-robin listing of ideas (30 minutes)

Divide into small groups of 5 to 12 individuals. Within each of the small groups, proceed around the table with each person in turn briefly stating one idea. No discussion other than clarification is permitted.

The group recorder then lists these ideas by number on the large pad or newsprint, taking care not to summarize, categorize, or restate the individual statements. (Continue the process until all ideas have been expressed.) At this point, ideas from separate brainstorm sessions may be added to the list.

Step 3: Individual group discussion (30 minutes)

Each group discusses the ideas listed on the pads, clarifying, lobbying, and defending the different statements. Avoid discussion among groups.

Step 4: First vote (10 minutes)

On new 5 x 8 cards, each person writes *first vote* in the upper right hand corner and the group's identification in the upper left. Then, using the numbers assigned to the statements (Step 2), everyone ranks the items listed on the large sheets. Individuals must work in silence! (Prior to the the meeting, the organizers or program staff should determine how many items will be required for ranking: no fewer than three, no more than five.)

To establish group priorities, scores for the individually ranked items should be tallied by the group leader, (this is a good time for a 5– to 10–minute coffee break!) If you wish to identify the five highest priority items, give a score of 5 to the first (top) priority item of each individual, 4 to the second priority item of each individual, and so on. Record these scores beside items listed on the large sheets and then total the scores for each item. The highest overall score is considered the item of highest priority, the second highest score, second priority, etc.

Step 5: Group discussion of first vote (20 minutes)

Now the small groups come together as one large group. Group leaders combine the results of the small groups into a master list on the large sheets of paper for all in the room to see. (Each item on the master list should be assigned its own reference number and total score. Duplicate statements from different groups have their scores added together.)

Each group is then asked to discuss independently the items on the master list. Group leaders are responsible for obtaining clarification on any of the items for members of their groups. Open discussion among groups should be discouraged.

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Step 6: Final group vote (10 minutes)

On a new 5 x 8 card, each group member writes *final vote* in the upper right corner and the group identification in the upper left corner. Everyone then makes a final ranking of the priorities, in an effort to eliminate some of the items and allow for changes in personal views. All must write independently and in silence.

Step 7: Wrap up (20 minutes)

The final group rankings are tallied by the group leaders and combined into a final master list of priorities in a procedure similar to Step 5. Each priority is clarified by the coordinator so that everyone understands what has been decided by the total assembly. The coordinator again tells everyone why the information was obtained, and offers praise for what has been accomplished at the meeting. Group leaders collect all materials including the 5 x 8 cards. The coordinator thanks the participants and adjourns the meeting.

**(Note: In a meeting of 12 people or less, where all are in one group, the nominal group process becomes much simpler because it eliminates the need for group leaders, a master list, and Steps 5 and 6.)

Cautions and Limitations

The coordinator must be sure that:

- Instructions are clear and uncomplicated
- Explanation is well organized
- Delivery is appropriate (no distractions due to inexperience in public speaking)
- Confidence is communicated through a combination of firmness and diplomacy
- Feedback is encouraged by questions and response to nonverbal signals from the audience (posture, facial expressions, gestures)
- Flexibility is shown in responding to the audience but not in bending the rules of the nominal group process

Other Uses

Other uses of nominal group process include:

- Planning for long–range needs
- Bringing together people who seldom interact
- Generating enthusiasm and commitment
- Encouraging interagency cooperation
- Helping people with strong opinions on a topic to see different viewpoints

OUTLINE GUIDE FOR MEETING LEADER

Introduction

The purpose of this process is to identify needs of youth in Blizzard County for the next 12 months. Nominal group process is a tested and refined process that works. It is structured into steps. Staying on time is important. Rules will be followed to ensure opportunities for everyone's opinion. We will move from individual opinions to group priorities. We need your serious effort, cooperation, and trust. The statement we are addressing is: "By this time next year the following needs of youth in our county should be met."

Overview: List the steps. Then provide the following explanation.

Step 1. Individual writing (10 minutes)

Write as many brief answers to the statement as you can. Break into small groups of 5 to 12 individuals.

Step 2. Assign to small groups with a facilitator.

Use a round robin—each person giving one response in turn. Keep going around until each is done. The facilitator writes on newsprint. No discussion, elaboration, evaluation, or comments is allowed. Move quickly.

Step 3. Small-group debate (30 minutes)

Clarify, lobby, defend, attack ideas (not people). Which ideas are most important? We will vote at the end of this debate so this is your chance to convince others of what is important.

Step 4. Vote

—Hand out new index cards (blue).

—Mark card 1st– 2nd– 3rd.

—Put number of the most important idea after 1st. (1st–17).

—Put number of second most important after 2nd. (2nd–1).

—Put number of third most important after 3rd. (3rd–4).

—Do not vote for more than five answers or your vote will not be counted.

Coffee Break (10 Minutes)—Tabulation

Step 5. Reports and general discussion (20 Minutes)

Same as for small-group debate.
Small-group facilitators report results of each group's top 10 to 15.

Step 6. Vote and tabulate (10 Minutes)

On ideas for all small-group lists 1st, 2nd, 3rd (4th?, 5th?)

Step 7. Results announced (20 Minutes)

Next steps indicated. Who will get the information generated? What will happen as a result of this needs assessment?

ORIENTATION FOR GROUP LEADERS

Overview of Nominal Group Process Steps

On step 1.

The coordinator will provide instructions before breaking into small groups.
Group leaders will need to repeat those instructions to the small groups and enforce them.

On step 2.

— Number each response as you write it on the newsprint. Write clearly and large enough for all to see.

— Allow no discussion except between you and the respondent, and then only to get it onto the newsprint concisely. No further elaboration or explanation is allowed.

— All evaluative comments by other members are to be politely but firmly cut off.

— You start first to show by example an ideal response.

— Move as quickly as possible.

On Step 3.

— Encourage lively debate, but encourage brevity instead of long speeches.

— Ask questions to bring out group members' ideas.

On Step 4.

— Quickly tabulate and make a new list of the top 10 to 15 priorities.

On Step 5.

— Report very briefly.

— Tell us the top priorities with explanation only where needed.

On Step 6.

—

—

On Step 7.

—

—

Please do not vary from these set instructions. You were chosen because you are seen as unbiased, neutral; therefore you should follow the process and let any mistakes be blamed on that process.

COUNTY FORUM

This needs assessment approach is similar to nominal group process. It is a structured group process with a broader scope (for instance, not just youth assessment) and has slightly different steps.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE FORUM?

The primary purpose of the public forum is to obtain input from county residents concerning future directions and needs for the country. Specific objectives include:

— to discuss emerging social, economic and demographic trends in the county and their implications for future needs of area residents.

— to obtain input from county residents concerning their priorities among the key issues affecting agriculture, families, youth, and communities.

— to develop ideas for dealing with priority concerns.

— to develop interagency cooperation in addressing emerging county issues.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS FOR EXTENSION AND OTHER COUNTY AGENCIES?

Holding a public forum can result in a number of benefits for extension as well as other county agencies.

— County–specific information about emerging program opportunities and needs in the county.

— Broad–based input from key clientele groups in the county such as farmers, homemakers, youth, local government officials, civic groups, and business people concerning their priorities for future educational and technical assistance programs.

— Legitimization of future county–level program plans. Clientele are more likely to support and participate in county programs for which they have had prior input.

— Development of a comprehensive and integrated program strategy for the county.

— Future clientele needs are assessed across interdisciplinary lines (agriculture, family living, youth, and community). The inter-relationships and complementarities between program areas surface and are highlighted in the project.

— Promotion of interagency cooperation in addressing critical issues facing the county.

— Identification of opportunities for sharing personnel and resources between counties to support common program thrusts.

— Facilitation of staff education and hiring decisions by providing accurate information about emerging county issues and needs.

WHO SHOULD PLAN THE FORUM?

A committee of five to ten people should be formed to plan the county forum. It is important that this committee include broad representation from clientele groups including farmers, homemakers, youth leaders, local government, planning organizations, and other key groups in the county.

WHAT ARE THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PLANNING COMMITTEE?

The county planning committee has three basic responsibilities.

— Organizing the public meeting.

— Deciding who should be invited to attend the county forum.

— Coming up with a strategy to ensure good attendance.

In general these tasks can be accomplished in just one or two meetings.

WHAT SHOULD BE THE AGENDA FOR THE FORUM?

It is recommended that the agenda for the forum include the following:

I. Overview of emerging social, economic, and demographic trends affecting the county (maximum of 20 minutes)

II. Small-group discussion (1 hour)

Break into groups of 10 to 15 people to discuss the following:

- Issues affecting the future profitability of agriculture
- Issues important to the future quality of life of individuals, families, and communities
- Issues important to local youth
- Issues affecting the future economic well being of county residents

III. Reports back from small groups and summary (40 minutes)

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE OVERVIEW?

The primary purpose of the overview is to get people thinking towards the future. A good way to do this is to briefly review key social, demographic, and economic trends affecting the county. Examples of important trends include, changes in the number and size of farms in the county, changes in the type of commodities produced, and growth in employment and income, growth in population or changes in the proportion of county residents in different age categories. The most important trends will vary from county to county.

The main benefits from the forum will come from the small-group discussions. In order to allow plenty of time for that discussion, it is important to keep this initial segment of the program brief (no more than 20 minutes). Consequently, an important job of the planning committee is to decide which trends are most important to its county. The first team meeting attended by each county extension director should help in reaching this decision. Additional help can also be obtained from team leaders and extension specialists.

WHERE DO WE GET THE INFORMATION FOR THE OVERVIEW?

In most counties up-to-date information on important social, economic, and demographic trends is available from local planning agencies. These agencies should be contacted to find out what is available locally. In addition, a substantial amount of information is available from the Penn tate Department of Agricultural Economic and Rural Sociology at University Park.

It is hoped that prior to this meeting, county planning committees will have identified the information they need.

WHO SHOULD PRESENT THE OVERVIEW?

The individual presenting the overview should be widely respected by county residents and able to present the information in an unbiased manner. The planning committee should avoid asking someone who might be perceived by participants as "having an axe to grind." County extension directors are encouraged to provide the overview presentation themselves.

HOW SHOULD SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS BE ORGANIZED?

The small-group discussions are the heart of the forum. Approximately an hour should be set aside for these discussions. Prior to the forum the county planning committee needs to decide the topics of discussion for the small-group discussions suggested topics include; issues affecting the future profitability of agriculture; issues important to the quality of life of families, individuals, and communities; issues important to youth and issues important to the future economic well being of county residents.

At registration, ask them to sign-up for one of the small-group topics using sign up sheets provided in the documents envelope. Each group should have 10 to15 people. It is fine to have more than one small group addressing the same topic. However, it is important to make an effort to have at least one group addressing each of the topics identified by the planning committee. Based upon the sign-up, divide participants into their chosen groups immediately following the overview.

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WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THESE SMALL GROUPS?

The goal of each small group is to identify priority issues and needs relating to their assigned topic and to brainstorm about specific actions needed to deal with these concerns.

WHO SHOULD LEAD THE DISCUSSION IN EACH SMALL GROUP?

Prior to the forum, the county planning committee should tap individuals to be small-group discussion leaders. It is advisable to have up to 10 individuals prepared to lead group discussions if needed. Small-group leaders should have experience in leading group discussions. County planning directors, human service agency personnel, and extension personnel are often good educators.

IS THERE EVER A PROBLEM OF FINGER-POINTING OR GRANDSTANDING DURING THESE DISCUSSIONS?

In general, this is not a problem. Everyone has an equal say, no matter what his or her job or position in the county. However, it is a good idea to state specifically at the outset that the ground rules for the forum include no grandstanding and no finger-pointing. By stating these rules openly, the meeting moderator and small-group leaders are on solid ground in cutting off anyone who might violate these rules.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS?

The final half-hour of the forum is devoted to reports back from each small group. Specifically, the whole group is brought back together. Leaders of discussion groups (or their designees) are asked to summarize the priority concerns identified by their groups. After each group has had a chance to report back, the moderator (usually the county extension director or his/her designee) should wrap-up the meeting by noting the issues common to several program areas. For example, concern over rapid population growth in the Pocono-area counties is likely to be an important issue for all four program areas.

Before dismissing participants, the moderator should remind the group that a written report summarizing results of the forum will be prepared.

WHO SHOULD BE INVITED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE FORUM?

The key to a successful forum is to have the attendance of a broad cross-section of county residents representing all different walks of life including:

Farmers

Leaders of farm organizations

Homemakers

Youth leaders

Leaders of civic organizations

Elected county officials

Municipal government leaders

Business people

Extension board members

County and local planners

HOW CAN WE ENSURE GOOD ATTENDANCE?

An important job of the planning committee is to come up with a specific strategy for getting good attendance at the forum. In particular, it is important to have participation from a broad cross-section of county residents. To help with this effort, the document file includes a sample press release and a sample direct mail invitation. A follow-up phone call to media representatives is often needed to ensure adequate press coverage. Direct invitations, both by mail and in person, are critical to a successful forum.

WHAT EQUIPMENT AND ROOM ARRANGEMENTS ARE NEEDED?

A checklist of room arrangement and equipment needs is provided.

SHOULD THE MEDIA BE INVITED TO ATTEND?

Yes. The public forum can be an important catalyst, bringing together key agencies, individuals, and organizations in addressing critical issues facing the county. Media coverage of the county forum is an important part of this process.

WHY IS A FINAL REPORT NEEDED?

The experience of counties in the Northeast extension region was that the written report was critical as a basis for future follow-up on recommendations and priorities which evolved out of the local meeting. The report provides documented evidence which can be used by local agencies, public officials, and organizations in planning strategies to deal with critical local issues.

ARE GUIDELINES FOR PREPARING THE FINAL REPORT AVAILABLE?

A model final report established for counties in the Northeast extension region is available upon request. The report is basically a compilation of social, demographic, and economic data presented during the overview and a summary of problems and positive actions identified by small groups. Other counties should be able to prepare their own reports simply by editing the model report, substituting local information.

FORUM PLANNING CHECKLIST

2 Months Prior to Forum

____ Assemble the planning committee members

____ Prepare tentative forum agenda

____ Decide on content for overview

____ Identify and invite person to present overview

____ Identify and secure small-group leaders

____ Develop lists of persons to receive personal invitations to forum

____ Reserve a place with a general assembly room for 100 or more people. A room is also needed for discussion groups of 10 to 15 people each. An alternative is to plan on arranging chairs within the general assembly room in circles of 15 rather than moving people to a separate room.

1 Month Prior to Forum

____ Mail out personal invitations to targeted participants

3 Weeks Prior to Forum

____ Share news release with local media

____ Obtain biographical information for introducing presenter(s)

2 Weeks Prior to Forum

____ Secure flipcharts, easels, or another way to hang newsprint sheets. Need one for each discussion group

____ Secure overhead projector and screen for overview presentation

____ Call small-group leaders and presenter(s) to confirm plans

____ Place follow-up phone call to media asking them if they have received the press release and invite them to the event

1 Week Prior to Forum

____ Prepare envelopes for each small-group leader. In each envelope include:

____ markers for flipchart

____ 15 pencils

____ 30 index cards

____ 75 removable labels (or similar stickers, five per person in small discussion group)

____ Small-group discussion guide matching the topic assigned to the group

____ Prepare a registration table at the doorway of the general assembly room. You'll need:

- name tags
- registration list requesting name and address of participants for mailing copies of final report.
- pencils
- small group sign-up sheets
- masking tape for hanging sheets to the wall during the wrap-up session

Night of Forum

____ One hour prior to start, meet with leaders of discussion groups and presenters to make sure they know their assignments

____ Hand out envelopes to leaders of discussion groups

____ Instruct leaders of discussion groups

____ Check equipment and registration table to make sure everything is in place

____ Make sure room(s) is set up for small-group discussions

Next Day

____ Type information from newsprint sheets used by group leaders onto standard paper

____ Be prepared for follow-up media interviews

____ Send out a prepared press release

Within Two Weeks

____ Prepare final report

Within One Month

____ Mail final report to forum participants, key agencies, public officials, and other key organizations and individuals in the county

Within Two Months

____ Meet with advisory committees, extension boards, public officials, and other county agencies to evaluate current efforts addressing concerns identified in the forum and additional actions needed to deal with those concerns

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DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR SMALL GROUPS

Instructions

Prepare a small-group discussion guide similar to the example below for each of the following issues:

- Issues affecting the future profitability of agriculture.
- Issues important to the quality of life of individuals, families, and communities.
- Issues important to local youth.
- Issues affecting the future economic well being of county residents.
- Share and discuss guidelines with your chosen small-group discussion leaders prior to the forum
- Emphasize conduct of leader as facilitator.
- The "stickers" referred to in step 2 are labels available at most business supply stores.

Checklist for Room and Equipment Needs

____ Reserve/secure a place with a general assembly room for 100 or more people. Also needed is a room for discussion groups of 10 to 15 people each. An alternative is to plan on arranging chairs within the general assembly room in circles of 15 rather than moving to a separate room.

____ Secure flipcharts, easels or other way to hang newsprint sheets. One flipchart, easel, or other appropriate stand is needed for each small group.

____ Have available an overhead projector and screen for the overview presentation

Prepare envelopes for each small-group leader. In each envelope include:

____ markers for flipchart

____ 15 pencils

____ 30 index cards

____ 75 PRES-a-ply removable labels (or similar stickers).

____ small-group discussion guide matching the topic assigned to the group

Plan to set up a registration table at the doorway of the general assembly room. At the registration table, have available:

____ name tags

____ registration list requesting name and address of participants.
(This list is needed to mail copies of final report later on).

____ small-group sign-up sheets

____ masking tape for hanging sheets to the wall during the wrap-up session

ERIC

THE FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW

WHAT IS THE FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW?

The focus group interview is an excellent way to obtain information from people. It can provide valuable insights for program planners, administrators, and evaluators. The focus group interview allows for group interaction and further perspective into why certain opinions are held. It can assess what clients think about a proposed program, identify the strengths and weaknesses of a new program, determine how to promote a program or activity, or assess the current impact of a program.

HOW CAN THE FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW PROCESS HELP EXTENSION AGENTS WITH NEEDS ASSESSMENT?

Focus group interviewing is well-suited for uncovering information on human perceptions, feelings, opinions, and thoughts. It can help agents keep in tune with the current needs of their clientele.

WHY DOES THE FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW PROCESS WORK?

Focus group interviewing works because the moderator is allowed to probe into what the client groups think and feel about a particular program. Group interview respondents stimulate one another. One comment often leads to another from a different participant. Focus group interviewing works because it is flexible. Participants are encouraged to share any idea, regardless of prestige in the group or skill in small group interaction.

Rules of the focus group interview

1. Participants should be careful to speak one at a time.
2. Negative comments are permitted and encouraged.
3. The sessions should last no more than an hour and a half.

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HOW TO USE THE FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW

The following is a step-by-step approach in using the focus group interview process.

The Planning Phase

Step 1: Consider the purpose

- Write down the description of the problem or situation and the purposes of the study.
- Why conduct such a study?
- What types of information are important?

Step 2: Consider the ultimate use of the findings.

Step 3: Develop a plan and estimate resources needed.

Write the plan in chronological order containing dates, steps, persons responsible, people assisting, and comments. A written plan is equivalent to a road map.

The Preparation Phase

Step 4: Identify questions to be asked.

- Formulate potential questions.
- Pick the key ones and arrange them in a logical sequence.
- Begin with general questions. Incorporate specific questions gradually.

Step 5: Preparation of the moderator

The moderator should be familiar with but not an active participant in the program. During the focus group interview, the moderator's role is critical. The moderator develops the mental set of the interview.

The moderator has a very challenging task. He/she must be prepared mentally. The moderator must use purposeful small talk at the beginning to put the participants at ease. Krueger's chapter on moderator skills (see bibliography below) will be useful.

Step 6: Selection and grouping of participants

Groups should range in size from 10 to 15 participants maximum. The participants in a group need common experiences. For instance, parents and leaders can usually be together. People must be comfortable with one another. Generally three to four distinct groups interviewed on subsequent evenings works efficiently.

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The Execution Phase

Step 7: Conduct the group interviews

Be ready for the unexpected. Tape the sessions.

Step 8: Analyze the results

Findings—What was said by the participants.

Interpretations —What do the findings mean?

Judgments—Are the findings of value to the program?

Recommendations—What should the clients do?

Step 9: Reporting the results

For best results, both an oral and a written report should be presented. Krueger points out suggestions to consider and provides formats for both the oral and written reports. See the bibliography reference list below.

Cautions and Limitations

Well-planned sessions are imperative for success with the focus group interview. Both the questions and moderator selected are crucial to the success of the focus group interview. The right questions require forethought and planning. The questions must be placed in a context that appears logical to the participants, and phrased in a way to elic freedom of response. The moderator must be able to concentrate and listen carefully. Often the moderator will need to draw discussion from the participants. Groups may vary considerably; the moderator must be prepared to handle any unexpected happenings. Therefore, the moderator must be free from distractions, anxieties, or pressures that would limit his or her ability to think quickly "on one's feet."

The focus group interview is easily misused; it requires systematic procedures to interpret data.

Other uses of the focus group interview

The focus group interview can help agents more fully meet program objectives and increase the impact of their programs. The following questions can be answered with the focus group interview:

"What do existing clients or potential clients think about the new proposal or program?"

"What are the strengths/weaknesses of the proposed program?"

"Will the new plan or program work?"

"How should we promote the new program?"

"How well is the current program working?"

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CHARACTERISTICS OF FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

1. Careful recruitment of participants

Seven to ten people per group

Similar types of people

People usually don't know each other

Three to four groups

2. Proper meeting environment

Neutral setting

Circle seating

Tape record

3. Skillful moderator

Trained

Establishes a permissive environment

Pre-determined questions

4. Appropriate analysis and reporting

Systematic analysis

Verifiable procedures

Appropriate Reporting

CHECK LIST FOR FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWING

Moderator Skills

____ Is moderator well rested and alert for focus group session?

____ Can moderator give standard introduction without referring to notes?

____ Can moderator remember questions without referring to notes?

____ Did moderator bring extra tapes, batteries, and extension cord?

____ Will moderator avoid comments that signal approval, i.e. excellent, good?

____ Will moderator avoid head nodding?

____ Will moderator avoid giving his or her own opinion?

Questions

____ Can introductory questions be answered quickly but not identify status?

____ Do questions flow in a logical sequence?

____ Do key question(s) focus on the critical issue of concern?

____ Has the moderator considered possible probe or follow-up questions?

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____ Will he moderator limit your use of "why" questions?

____ Will he moderator use "thinking back" questions as needed?

Advance notice

____ Were participants contacted by phone one-to-two weeks before the session?

____ Did participants receive a letter of invitation with location and time?

____ Did participants receive a reminder phone call the day before session?

____ Did you slightly over-recruit the number of participants?

Logistics

____ Is the room satisfactory (size, tables, comfort, etc)?

____ Will you arrive early enough at the location to make necessary changes?

____ Does background noise interfere with the tape recording?

____ Do you have name tags and/or name tents for participants?

____ Do you have a remote microphone that can be placed on the table?

____ Do you have topics for small-talk conversation when you greet participants?

____ Did you seat experts and loud participants on either side of moderator?

____ Did you seat shy and quiet participants directly across from moderator?

____ If having a meal, limit selections and stress fast service.

____ Arrange refreshments and find location of rest rooms.

____ Did you bring enough copies of handouts and/or visual aids?

Immediately after the session

____ Prepare a brief written summary of key points as soon as possible.

____ Check to see if the tape recorder captured the comments.

Soon after all sessions are concluded

____ Read all brief written summaries for group sessions.

____ Listen to the tapes and write down important quotations.

____ Prepare a summary for each of the important questions.

____ Organize summary around introductory, transition, and key questions.

Final stages

____ Prepare the final written report.

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AN EXAMPLE OF FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. *How would you descri*ͻ*e youth (8 to19 years old) in our county?*

2. *Are they different from youth elsewhere in this state? How or how not?*

3. *What are their needs?*

4. *Would these needs be the same for 4-H youth as those not in 4-H?*

5. *Are there minority youth groups who have unique needs?*

6. *Are there low-income youth groups who have unique needs?*

7. *Are there any other youth groups who have unique needs? Who are they? What are their needs?*

8. *Are there needs that we have identified that 4-H should address?*

BRAINSTORM FOR IDEAS

WHAT IS BRAINSTORMING?

Brainstorming is a great way to get lots of ideas and lots of involvement. It is fun. It gets everyone's ideas out on the table. It does not embarrass individuals. There are no losers if brainstorming is led correctly.

Brainstorming is a simple, effective technique for generating ideas. To be most effective, however, it must be done carefully. Brainstorming will produce many useful ideas if the technique is properly introduced, if six simple rules are followed, if the purpose is clearly stated, and if the group doing the brainstorming is large enough and has ideas about group directions.

How brainstorming can help extension agents in doing needs assessment

- Involve members in listening.
- Turn individual ideas into group ideas.
- Provide material for goal setting.
- Lead to the formation of committees which carry out the goals.

WHY BRAINSTORMING WORKS

Brainstorming works because the group is encouraged to produce as many ideas as possible, with no thought for how practical the ideas might be. Any idea is good. Criticism is not allowed during the brainstorming so people need not be defensive or self-conscious. Everyone is encouraged to participate in a free-wheeling atmosphere. It becomes fun. With a time limit imposed, participants are encouraged to blurt out ideas. Everyone can participate successfully regardless of prestige in the group or skill in small group interaction.

SIX RULES OF BRAINSTORMING

Because quantity of ideas rather than quality of ideas is desired, the following rules must be made clear at the outset, then enforced during the process.

1. Yell out ideas, do not wait to be recognized.
2. Wild ideas are alright; all ideas are good at this stage.
3. Hitchhike on each other's ideas (yell out ideas that are only slightly different than someone else's idea), do not hold back an idea just because it does not seem to be original.
4. Stick to a time limit. Five to ten minutes, depending on the subject and the participants, is usually plenty of time to generate enough ideas. A sense of urgency helps lower inhibitions and keep ideas flowing.
5. Be brief, do not attempt to explain, elaborate on, or justify your ideas.
6. Do not evaluate any idea by word, facial expression, or body language.

HOW TO DO BRAINSTORMING

A leader for the brainstorming is designated. This may be done in two ways: 1.) An officer or committee chair asks an assembled group to help generate ideas. That person assumes the leadership of the brainstorming process. 2.) A group gets bogged down and someone suggests, "We need some new ideas; let's try brainstorming; Joe, would you conduct the brainstorm session?"

The leader states the purpose of the brainstorming (i.e. to generate ideas for the coming year's program), and asks the group if they understand and agree with the purpose. Brainstorming may not work if some participants are unclear about the purpose or disagree with the purpose.

The leader makes sure that a chalkboard and chalk or newsprint and markers are available and that all participants are seated so that they can see the ideas as they are recorded. The leader records the ideas as they are shouted out. A second recorder may be needed if the group is larger than a few participants. Two recorders can alternate as the ideas are shouted out so that the brainstorm participants do not need to wait with their ideas while the recorder is writing.

The leader repeats the six rules of brainstorming and asks if all participants understand the rules. The time limit is announced by the leader. The purpose of the brainstorming is restated once more and the leader asks, "Is everyone ready?"

The leader checks the time and says. "Go!" As long as ideas are flowing the leader records them without comment. If the ideas are not flowing, the leader may suggest an idea and record it. If any rule is broken, the leader politely but firmly enforces the rule without explanation. The leader may check the time occasionally to communicate urgency. However, the time limit need not be observed rigidly. If the ideas are still flowing, the leader may elect to keep going. If the group runs out of ideas the leader may stop early.

After the leader calls "time," the group should be complimented on its cooperation and productivity. The brainstorming is over and the discussion begins. First the leader should ask if there is any idea on the list that is not understood. After clarifications are complete, then evaluation may begin. Ideas which are completely impractical may be eliminated from the list if the group agrees. The group may be particularly enthusiastic about two or three ideas. Those may be moved to the top of the list or marked. The leader should ask someone to transfer the ideas to a sheet of notebook paper so that they will not be lost. Finally, the leader may indicate what will happen to the ideas (for example: they might be presented to the next regular meeting of the organization for discussion and voting; they might be referred to standing committees for action; or they might be discussed by the officers at the next executive meeting). The group should be thanked for its help.

CAUTIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Some individuals may have difficulty in getting away from practical thinking. They may see the process as frivolous or a waste of time. In the wrap-up discussion it is necessary to criticize the ideas. Some individuals may have trouble accepting criticism after the free-wheeling brainstorm where evaluation was prohibited. Many suggestions may be discarded in the end. That may offend one or more individuals. For other reasons brainstorming may cause problems. Abandon it if necessary and try another approach. But give it a chance before deciding to abandon it.

If sprung on clients at a meeting, brainstorming may catch some people cold. Sending out a notice, so that they can prepare, will avoid this.

OTHER USES OF BRAINSTORMING

Brainstorming can also be used to evaluate an activity, to solve a problem, to break the ice in a group where participants do not know each other very well, to get quieter members to speak up, and to liven up an otherwise dull meeting.

OTHER NEEDS ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUES

Besides the techniques described in this notebook, the following can be used for needs assessment:

- Evaluation instruments
- Radio call in/write in
- Delphi questionnaire (a research method)
- Group discussion
- Force field analysis
- Simulation games
- Group meetings to develop a calendar of activities
- Tele-conferencing (telephone or TV)

Adaptation of some of these techniques to extension needs assessment requires more study and development. Evaluation of programs can be a part of needs assessment but does not, by itself, constitute a comprehensive needs assessment.

MISUSES OF TECHNIQUES

Caution must guide needs assessment efforts. Some of the more common mistakes to avoid are discussed in this section.

Office techniques alone are inadequate. Used with other group or survey techniques, an office technique can be very helpful.

Social indicators can be misused when the agent simply uses incomplete information. Census data can be overwhelming. Before using census sources an agent should make a list of questions to ask the data concerning information needed. Another error in using census data is to generalize too much. Minority groups often have characteristics quite different than the general population.

Written survey questions should be checked by someone, different than the author, who has experience in writing questionnaires. Including too many unnecessary questions, poorly worded questions, biased questions, or personal questions can cause respondents to ignore the survey.

Phone surveys can go wrong if the interviewers are not well trained. Consistency is lost when different interviewers ask the questions in different ways, or react to questions from the respondent in different ways.

County forum depends heavily on the small-group leader. If that person is inexperienced or ineffective, the group discussion can break down and the voting can be affected.

Nominal group process is sometimes compromised when the group tries to shorten the process or ignore some of the rules. This technique works well when the leader is well organized and sticks to the process and the rules.

Focus group interviews depend on a leader who is well prepared. Working as a recorder or apprentice under an interviewer experienced with focus groups is necessary before an agent attempts to lead this technique.

Brainstorming works if the rules are followed. "Brainstorm" is a term that is loosely used by some people to describe any unstructured discussion. But a brainstorm session is very structured. Unless the steps and rules are followed carefully, the needs identified may be questionable.

In each of these needs assessment techniques selection of the respondents is critical. If 4-H leaders are used exclusively to identify needs of youth, the information will be biased. Any group of respondents tends to have its own perspective. To properly determine needs of youth, the respondents selected should represent all of the different perspectives that can be identified.

Poor planning and sloppy execution can ruin any needs assessment effort. Enough time needs to be allocated to this effort to make it worthwhile. In the long term, the outcomes of an effective needs assessment will more than compensate for the time invested.

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COUNTY ADVISORY COMMITTEES

Needs assessment can be greatly strengthened by input from a well organized advisory committee which has an informed perspective. In Pennsylvania, 4-H agents are advised to organize a 4-H program development committee. Some criteria for these program development committees are listed below. They should:

— be representative of the county

— include youth membership

— have an established rotation of membership (i.e., 2- or 3-year staggered terms)

— meet regularly (at least quarterly)

— keep a complete set of minutes of all decisions

— be thoroughly oriented by the agent and experienced committee members

— know their role, expectations, and limitations

— help with the planning and implementation of needs assessment, program planning, program implementation, and program evaluation

— understand the county and state policies that affect them

— be involved in fund raising, budgeting, and financial management decisions

— be linked to the county extension board in some way

— have bylaws or operational procedures written down and available when needed

— be comprised of 7 to 12 members

— be linked to regional program development committees

SUMMARY OF PENNSYLVANIA COUNTY YOUTH NEEDS ASSESSMENTS

FOUR-YEAR REPORT

EVALUATION OF COUNTY YOUTH NEEDS ASSESSMENTS DURING 1987-91

The Problem

Critics of 4-H (including university administrators, state and county politicians, potential donors, parents, youth, extension specialists and agents, 4-H families, and representatives of other community organizations) have asserted that 4-H is "out of date" and does not provide relevant learning opportunities for all youth. If 4-H educational programs are based primarily on past experience and the wishes of traditional clientele, these critics can not be effectively answered.

Purpose and Research Questions

This longitudinal study was designed to enable effective program planning based on county assessments of the needs of youth. Several questions had to be answered.

- Which needs assessment techniques are preferred by county 4-H agents?
- Will county program development (advisory) committees be effectively incorporated in the needs assessment process?
- What barriers impede county agents from conducting youth needs assessments?
- Do agents intend to conduct a needs assessment in the "next" program year?
- What needs assessment techniques do agents intend to use next year?
- Do agents know who to contact at the state level to help them plan their county needs assessments?
- What needs of youth will be identified during the needs assessments?

Methodology

As a result of the program planning process, most agents realized that they would be expected to conduct county based assessments of the needs of youth in their counties. Therefore, they were responsive when a statewide inservice workshop was offered in March 1988, on conducting needs assessments. The objectives of the workshop were to (1) describe the 4-H program development process and a timetable for implementing it; (2) list options for doing county needs assessments; and (3) develop skills in using one of the options.

Workshop sessions for all participants included (1) an overview of program development steps, (2) an overview of possible needs assessment techniques, and (3) group discussion and questions.

Eight needs assessment techniques were taught two-at-a-time in concurrent sessions.

- written surveys
- telephone surveys
- focus groups
- office techniques (listening, interviewing, resource inventory, review of files)

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- group discussion with advisory groups
- county/community forum
- the nominal group process
- social indicators (how to access census data and similar information)

Examples were given for each topic, handouts were prepared, and participants were involved in microteaching and role plays to develop skills in using the techniques.

The two-day workshop was attended by representatives of most of the 67 counties in Pennsylvania. A notebook of all of the handouts from the different sessions was assembled. The notebook was given to each participant and sent to county offices that were not represented at the workshop. The notebook described brainstorming and the futures wheel, two needs assessment techniques not covered in the workshop, and it listed other possible techniques.

County 4-H coordinators were urged to plan needs assessments for the 4-H program year which began October 1, 1988. Assistance was offered by the state 4-H faculty member responsible for program planning and needs assessment. In October 1988 a questionnaire was sent to each county 4-H coordinator, asking seven research questions to establish baseline data on needs assessment activity and attitudes at the county level. The same questionnaire was sent to the same county 4-H coordinators in 1989, 1990, and 1991.

1. During the following years, was your county extension staff able to assess the needs of youth in your county?

Response	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
Yes	22	26	26	30
No	40	30	39	30
NR	5	11	2	7

2. Which needs assessment technique(s) did you use?

	Number of agents using technique			
Technique	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
County/community forum	11	6	10	2
Brainstorm	8	14	14	10
Written questionnaire survey	6	7	7	15
Nominal group process	3	10	6	3
Census data	3		3	1
Telephone survey	2		1	0
Focus group interview		1	1	0
Group discussion	2	14	23	16
Other agency report		2		3
Individual discussions		1		1
Feasibility study		1		
County program review		1		
Resource inventory		1	2	1

3. Please enclose a summary of results of any needs assessment that was conducted for youth in your county along with the dates that you collected the information.

Needs identified	*Number of agents responding* 1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91
Job opportunities, careers, unemployment	13	7	12	12
Drug/alcohol abuse	13	1	14	9
Availability of recreational activities for youth	10	4	11	8
Family breakdown, strengths, domestic violence, abuse role models	12	16	13	9
Planned parenthood education/ pregnancy, sex education/AIDS	17	6	15	8
Self-esteem, self-image, stress, wellness, suicide, peer pressure, motivation	14	13	26	9
Providing training for leaders and parents	6	3		
Improve 4-H club development and activities/recognize more 4-H'ers for participation/wrong priorities	6	5	8	7
Should have county 4-H camp/ expand 4-H program			6	4
4-H member retention/ recruitment	5	1	1	9
Leadership, communications, citizenship	4	6	10	14
Intergenerational involvement: parent-youth	5			8
Transportation	5		6	3
School enrichment programs (in-school 4-H programs)/ quality of education	8	8	11	7
Appropriate child-care facilities/ latch-key	3	4	7	6
Accident prevention/safety training	3	1		2
Goal setting for higher vocations	2		1	6
Too much television	2	1		
Decrease emphasis on athletics	2	2		
Environmental		2	4	
Government programs/welfare/ economic development		4		

Needs identified	1987-88	Number of agents responding 1988-89	1989-90	1990-91
Gangs, crime		2	2	4
Poverty		2		
Spiritual development			3	
Independent skills			2	
Volunteer management			1	6
Money/funding for 4-H program			9	8
Lack of support groups			5	5
Health and personal appearance			2	6
Should have county 4-H camp/ miscellaneous (one mention)			1	13

4. What involvement, if any, did your county program development committee have in the needs assessment(s) described above?

Response	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91
No involvement	4	2	1	9
Yes, limited involvement	5	13	13	5
Yes, involved	8	11	12	17

5. If no needs assessment was conducted during the following FYs, can you tell us why not?

Reason	1987-88	Number of agents responding 1988-89	1989-90	1990-91
Needs assessments done prior to specified time	13			1
No 4-H staff available/not fully staffed/agent left before FY over	11	6	9	12
Too time consuming/lack of time	10	14	13	6
Don't know how to do a needs assessment	8	1	1	2
Results might cause problems or conflicts	3	1	1	2
Other factors are of higher priority	3	1	2	4
Not yet coordinated	2	2		
Other community group assessed community needs	2	1		1
4-H committee can't see benefits of doing an assignment	1			
We are planning a major assessment in the near future		1	3	1

Reason	1987-88	Number of agents responding 1988-89	1989-90	1990-91
We are still working with the results of our previous county forum		5		5
Need a total needs assessment instrument		1		1
Completed a major needs assessment during the last three years			11	7
Want full representation on 4-H advisory committee before pursuing again			1	
Already know the needs			1	2
Cost				1

6. Do you plan to conduct needs assessment in the following years?

Response	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	1991-92
Yes	25	27	27	31
No	14	16	34	17
Maybe		2	2	9
Undecided			1	
No answer			1	3

7. Which needs assessment technique(s) do you plan to use next year?

Technique	1987-88	Number of agents using technique 1988-89	1989-90	1990-91
Program development committee brainstorm	6	10	10	7
County/community forum	5	6	2	4
Written questionnaire	4	6	5	14
Nominal group process	4	3	1	
Telephone survey	2	4	1	1
Don't know	2	2	5	4
Program evaluation	1	4	2	5
Resource inventory		1	1	
Group discussion		9	5	9
Professional judgment of agency representatives			1	
County survey among 4-H'ers and leaders			2	
Census data			3	
Face-to-face interviews			1	
Focus group			2	2

8. Do you know who to contact at Penn State for help in planning or conducting a needs assessment?

Response	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
Yes		51	58	52
No		3	5	3
No answer			3	5

CONCLUSIONS

1. The number of counties conducting needs assessments increased over the four-year period.
2. More than half of the needs assessments reported in the first year were county/community forums in the Northeast Region, which were initiated by the Regional Director and assisted by the community development agent. They were not originally designed as part of the county youth needs assessments.
3. Twenty-two counties used 25 needs assessment techniques in 1987-88. Twenty-six counties used 58 needs assessment techniques in 1988-89. Thirty counties used 51 needs assessment techniques in 1990-91.
4. After using the county/community forum and nominal group process during the initial three years, agents' use of these techniques declined in the fourth year. Group discussion and brainstorm were the most popular techniques over the four years. Use of written surveys increased. The lack of use of census data all four years was disappointing.
5. Needs of youth that appeared consistently over the four-year period were:

   —opportunities for jobs and careers

   —help with substance abuse

   —lack of recreational facilities and activities

   —family strengths and support

   —parenthood and sex ed ..ation,

   —help to deal with self-esteem/stress/suicide

   —improving school programs (curricular and extra-curricular)

   —leadership, citizenship, communications
6. Involvement of county "program development committees" increased significantly in the second year, then leveled off.
7. "Lack of time" was the most frequent reason given by agents, over the three-year period, for not conducting a needs assessment. "Not fully staffed" was the second most frequent reason given.
8. In the first year, 13 counties indicated that they had completed a needs assessment just before, or just after, the 1987-88 fiscal year. For this reason they indicated no needs assessment was done in the first year.
9. In the third and fourth years, 18 counties who did no needs assessment also reported no needs assessment was done in the previous three years.
10. The number of counties planning a needs assessment "next year" increased slightly over the four-year period.
11. Needs assessment techniques to be used "next year" did not change greatly from year to year. Familiarity with new needs assessment techniques apparently did not encourage their use, one exception was use of written questionnaires.

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12. Most agents knew who to contact at Penn State for help with needs assessments.
13. Program assessments were frequently reported in lieu of needs assessments of youth.
14. The sharp rise in needs assessment between the first and second year was the partial result of extensive promotion and consultation by the 4-H faculty member responsible for introducing needs assessments to the counties. In the third year, he was given responsibility to coordinate international 4-H programs and his needs assessment responsibilities were lowered in priority. This change largely accounts for the minimal change in needs assessment efforts in the third and fourth years.
15. Due to the long period of time and the number of reminders needed for response from some counties, and due to the nonresponse to some of the questions, the investigator concluded that some county coordinators resist needs assessment. Apparently they do not see its importance and lack the motivation to make it a priority in their county program.
16. The investigator suspects that some informal needs assessments are done as a part of program planning and evaluation that are not recorded or are not recognized as needs assessments.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The statewide needs assessment training conducted in 1988 needs to be offered, with modifications, at the regional level. Faculty and other agents who can help with needs assessment efforts should be included as resources. County agents' attitudes about lack of time for needs assessment should be addressed so they see "lack of time" as a reason to do needs assessments rather than a reason to avoid a needs assessment.
2. County and regional directors should include needs assessments as part of their criteria for program and personnel evaluations in order to communicate the importance of needs assessments.
3. The needs assessment notebook should be revised, updated, and examples of useful instruments should be added.
4. A staff position needs to be dedicated to conducting a statewide needs assessment and assisting county agents with their local (supplementary) needs assessments. This staff person should provide census data and other social indicators to the counties.
5. The Youth Program Coordinating Council should decide how to address the top eight needs identified and who should be responsible.
6. For a strong county needs assessment four complementary approaches should be followed:

   (a) a county/community forum or nominal group process where all stakeholder groups are represented;

   (b) a questionnaire for youth administered, cooperatively with other youth agencies, through the schools;

   (c) census data which indicate key characteristics of 4-H aged youth should be gathered and compared with youth enrolled in 4-H in that county; and

   (d) 4-H program evaluations by participating youth and adults should be implemented. These techniques may be used in successive years over a four-year period in order to avoid an excessive time commitment in any one year.

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