Designing and Implementing Evaluation Policies
To Sustain Evaluation Practice
in Extension Programs

Monica Hargraves, PhD
Manager of Evaluation for Extension and Outreach
Cornell Office for Research on Evaluation

Margaret Johnson, MA
Research Assistant, Dept of Policy Analysis & Management
Cornell University

William Trochim, PhD
Professor, and Director of Evaluation for Extension and Outreach
Cornell Office for Research on Evaluation

American Evaluation Association Conference
November 8, 2008
Outline

- **Motivation:** Why develop evaluation policy in Extension?

- **Background and Methodology**
  - The “Evaluation Partnership” project
  - Concept Mapping approach
  - This pilot study

- **Results**

- **Implications** for efforts to build evaluation capacity in Extension

- **Conclusions**

- **Acknowledgements**
Motivation

- Demands for evaluation and accountability are growing
- Evaluation theory and tools are well-developed and available

And yet … there’s a long way to go

- How can the organizations we work with close the gap between evaluation they do and evaluation they want or need to do?

Key questions:

- What drives evaluation practice?
- What specific ideas and strategies can help?
- Where should a policy development effort start?

This study offers a starting point …
Background

- The “Evaluation Partnership” project with Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) to build evaluation capacity and practice
  - Seven CCE County Associations have been involved in this “systems approach” to evaluation, each with 4 or more programs participating in 2007 and 2008
  - Supported by Cornell Cooperative Extension, and NSF

- Participants in the study presented today included
  - “Evaluation Project Managers”, Program staff, and Executive Directors in these 7 offices
  - County staff and Executive Directors participating in the Program Leadership Certification course at CCE
  - Staff from CCE statewide administration and Cornell Office for Research on Evaluation (CORE)
Methodology: Concept Mapping

“Concept mapping seeks the open contribution of participant stakeholders’ ideas on a specific issue, organizes the ideas, and portrays them in pictures or maps that are readily understood.”

“By representing the efforts of participants as a geography of thought, across multiple communities of interest, it provides a new, quantitative framework for effective planning and evaluation efforts.”

Kane and Trochim, 2007
“Concept Mapping for Planning and Evaluation”
Concept Mapping Process

**Planning:** Planners and key issue advisors develop a *focus prompt* and *identify participants.*

**Idea Generation:** Communities of interest and expertise are identified, and respond with *brainstormed* ideas.

**Structuring:** Communities of interest and expertise *sort and rate* the results of the idea development, authoring the structure and value domain of the issue.

**Representation:** Compute the *maps, pattern matches and “go zones,”* and prepare them for interpretation by communities of interest.

**Interpretation and Use:** *Strategies and tactics for action* follow directly from the *interpretation* of the results. Pattern matches and go zones help build consensus on action.

*Our Project*

**Focus Prompt:** “One specific thing an Extension organization can do to support the practice of evaluation is …”

**Brainstorming:** 158 ideas from 58 people, obtained through multiple methods, pared down to a final set of 80 idea statements.

**Contributors:** 17

Extension staff (program and administration) in county offices of Cornell Cooperative Extension; and 16 from statewide CCE Administration and Cornell. Sorting and rating by 15; rating alone by 18.

*Concept Systems, Inc. © 2008*
One specific thing an Extension organization can do to support the practice of evaluation is...
(7) use the data collected to enact meaningful changes in programming.

One specific thing an Extension organization can do to support the practice of evaluation is..."
What the participants saw as conceptually similar ideas are in close proximity.

(34) establish policies around resource allocation, program development, reporting, etc. that emphasize evaluation.

(49) generate a long-term, strategic plan for evaluation.
Conceptually different ideas are further apart

(56) have an online list of resources for how to do evaluation and where to find more information on evaluation

(60) Recognize evaluation training and experience as a marketable skill

(57) build evaluation practices into Extension "accreditation" process.

One specific thing an Extension organization can do to support the practice of evaluation is..."
“Clusters” capture how the ideas were conceptualized by those who sorted.

One specific thing an Extension organization can do to support the practice of evaluation is..."
Maps can also be interpreted in terms of “regions”

Motivation

Communicate Value of Evaluation

Increase Incentives and Recognition

Leadership and Integration

Equipping People

Provide Technical Assistance

Expand and Tailor Resources

Standardize and Streamline

Collaborate, Capitalize

Provide Training

Designing for Success and Efficiency

Integrate into Organization Structure

Set Expectations and Requirements

Leadership and Integration

Value of Evaluation

Increase Incentives and Recognition

Communicate Value of Evaluation

Provide Technical Assistance

Provide Training

Collaborate, Capitalize

Standardize and Streamline

Designing for Success and Efficiency

Integrate into Organization Structure

Set Expectations and Requirements

Leadership and Integration
Comments on Mapping Results

- There is a “place” in people’s thinking for something quite distinct from technical capacity-building, and rule-making.

- Note: Mid-point on Map is:
  “provide constant feedback whenever staff are asked to do extra work for the evaluation (73)”

  ... and it was grouped together with nearly every other idea on the Map by at least one person

- Communication is present in several ways ...  
  - As an effort to build individual and organizational commitment to evaluation (Motivation)
  - And as a strategic tool for building on success, sharing what works, collaborating (Designing for success and efficiency)
Next, Rating: Two Criteria for Ideas ...

(1) **Potential Difference** - *how much of a difference would it make to evaluation efforts in Extension organizations if the following idea were put in place?*

1 - very little difference  
2 - some difference  
3 - moderate difference  
4 - substantial difference  
5 - very significant difference

(2) **Relative Difficulty** - *how easy or difficult would it be to put this idea into practice?*

1 - very easy  
2 - fairly easy  
3 - possible  
4 - somewhat difficult  
5 - very difficult
Relative Cluster Rankings, by “Potential Difference”

Communicate Value of Evaluation (#1)
Provide Technical Assistance (#8)
Increase Incentives and Recognition (#9)
Expand and Tailor Resources (#7)
Integrate into Organization Structure (#3)
Provide Training (#6)
Collaborate, Capitalize (#5)
Standardize and Streamline (#4)
Set Expectations and Requirements (#2)
Top-ranked Cluster in terms of “Potential Difference”:
Communicate the Value of Evaluation

educate Executive Directors on the importance of evaluation. (43)
educate staff and volunteers as to the benefits of evaluation. (1)
demonstrate how results of evaluation lead to better programming,
more resources, etc. (38)
make evaluation results easy to understand, streamlined, user friendly. (45)

have a person (or more than one) who champions evaluation within
the organization, and uses strength-based approaches to encouraging
and supporting evaluation work. (12)

plan and then evaluate the evaluation effort itself. (25)

engage participants directly in formulating evaluation questions and
pointing out specific program flaws. (66)
Relative Cluster Rankings, by “Relative Difficulty”

- Communicate Value of Evaluation (#5)
- Provide Technical Assistance (#9)
- Provide Training (#8)
- Collaborate, Capitalize (#7)
- Increase Incentives and Recognition (#6)
- Expand and Tailor Resources (#2)
- Standardize and Streamline (#1)
- Integrate into Organization Structure (#3)
- Set Expectations and Requirements (#4)
The GOOD news …

- The top two clusters in terms of Potential Difference -- “Communicate the Value of Evaluation” and “Set Expectations and Requirements” were considered among the least difficult to do!

- “Provide Training” and “Collaborate, Capitalize” were considered relatively easy to do, and provided a medium level of potential impact.

The NOT SO GOOD news …

- “Provide Technical Assistance” was considered to be relatively easy to do, but had relatively low potential impact.

- “Standardize and Streamline” was one of the top 4 in terms of Potential Difference, but was considered to be the most difficult.
Relative Idea Rankings: Bringing “Potential Difference” and “Relative Difficulty” together …

more difficult

2.09

2.98

4.09

less difficult

Potential Difference

lower impact
greater impact

“Low-Hanging Fruit”

“Go-Zone”!

Hard, but worth it?
Top Ten “Go-Zone” ideas …

educate Executive Directors on the importance of evaluation. (43)

educate staff and volunteers as to the benefits of evaluation. (1)

teach people ways of getting feedback (evaluation input) from what they already do -- logging phone calls and e-mail inquiries, comments at end-of-program celebrations, etc. -- and connect this to more formal evaluation methods. (44)

build an evaluation section into Plan of Work templates. (19)

provide training to staff on the hows and whys of evaluation. (78)

at the statewide level: provide tools or standards for specific, primary programs. (14)

link evaluation to proposal development (incl grant-writing) and program planning, implementation and reporting. (32)

after making sure staff have received evaluation training, incorporate evaluation skills and activity as part of performance appraisal information. (48)

when new staff begin in an Association, have specific examples of various evaluations available to look at. (24)

make evaluation part of every job description, including the top people. (17)
One specific thing an Extension organization can do to support the practice of evaluation is..."
Conclusions ...

- There is a strong human element inherent in supporting and sustaining evaluation practices.
  - People at all levels of an organization, including paid and volunteer staff, need to have their own good reasons to care about evaluation.

- Evaluation Policies should include all phases of evaluation: planning, implementation, and utilization.
  - In particular, “good use” of evaluation is important in motivating staff.

- Effective evaluation - and therefore policy - is not just about the programs, it’s about the organization.
  - Policies should strive to integrate evaluation into organizations in all ways - into job descriptions and performance reviews, strategic planning, staff discussions, external reporting, proposal development, etc.
Next Steps …

- Share these preliminary results with contributors and Cornell Cooperative Extension administration, gather their feedback, and identify short-term implications and action steps.
- Use these results to improve our Evaluation Partnership project.
- Work to place these results in context - relative to existing formal and informal Extension evaluation policies at CCE and elsewhere, relative to the evaluation literature, and through dialog with Extension Evaluation colleagues across the country.
- Expand the study across the Cornell Cooperative Extension system (and beyond?)
- Begin work on developing a taxonomy of Evaluation Policy.
Acknowledgements

- Cornell Office for Research on Evaluation (CORE): Claire Hebbard, Tom Archibald, Alison Cathles

- Evaluation Planning Partnerships: 7 County Associations of Cornell Cooperative Extension (New York City, Tompkins County, St. Lawrence County, Jefferson County, Chenango County, Onondaga County, Ulster County)

- The 33 participants in the Concept Mapping project – all of whom are staff members of the above Associations, or Cornell Cooperative Extension Administration, or CORE

- Special thanks to Brenda Pepe and Scott Rosas of Concept Systems, Inc. for consultations and support, and to David Filiberto for technical assistance.

Questions, comments? Contact Monica Hargraves, mjh51@cornell.edu

Thank you!