



## Reduce Evaluation Burden

**As a county agent, evaluating my programs is important to me and my future. Sometimes however, I feel I am evaluating my clients to death. What strategies will help me avoid this?**

Strategies depend on what you consider 'a program,' how it is structured, and if you are willing to plan your evaluation ahead of time. Below is one strategy; others can be found in other Tipsheets.

If you know you will have over 100 or so individuals participating in a program, consider sampling. Once you have addresses via a registration process, send every  $n^{\text{th}}$  person on your list a postcard conveying two ideas. One idea is that you wish to plan similar programs in the future and that you and your committee need to know what they as participants thought of the program. The second idea is that you wish to reduce the burden of having all participants give feedback this year and so you have randomly invited a group of participants of which they are one, to do so. Having given your audience a rationale for this particular evaluation, provide them with the evaluation questions when the program begins or send them along with the initial request. Subsequent to the program, provide them with follow-up questions.

The rest of the program participants, informed of your strategy, will be grateful this year and more likely to respond to your request to have them participate in a future evaluation.

The negative side of this strategy (there's always a negative side) is that you *could* introduce bias into the results. Because they received special attention from you, the persons you asked for feedback could get more (or less) involved in the program and produce stronger feelings than they would have if they had not been asked.

In addition, this sampling strategy is not recommended if you have reason to believe that the program participants have very different backgrounds and will have different views about the program because of their background. In that case, you may wish to include all program participants in the evaluation so you have enough cases in each subgroup to analyze the results for each one separately.

Nancy Ellen Kiernan, Ph.D., Program Evaluator, [nekiernan@psu.edu](mailto:nekiernan@psu.edu)

The reference citation for this Tipsheet is: Kiernan, Nancy Ellen (2001). Reduce Evaluation Burden: Tipsheet #6, University Park, PA: Penn State Cooperative Extension.  
Available at: <http://www.extension.psu.edu/evaluation/pdf/TS6.pdf>

This Web site is copyrighted by The Pennsylvania State University. The information may be used for educational purposes but not sold for profit.