



Evaluating Participants' Expectations of a Program

PROGRAM EDUCATOR

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EVALUATION OBJECTIVES

In designing a program evaluation, you initially consider two things:

- the program's educational objectives (expected change in knowledge, attitudes, skills, intentions, and behavior on the part of the target audience) and
- what stakeholders for this program want to know in order to support the program in future.

See: <http://www.extension.psu.edu/evaluation/pdf/TS83.pdf>.

Yet in certain circumstances, when working with a new audience you don't know well, or an audience of particular importance to Extension, you might want your evaluation strategy to include something else. That something else is measuring the extent to which the participants' expectations were met.

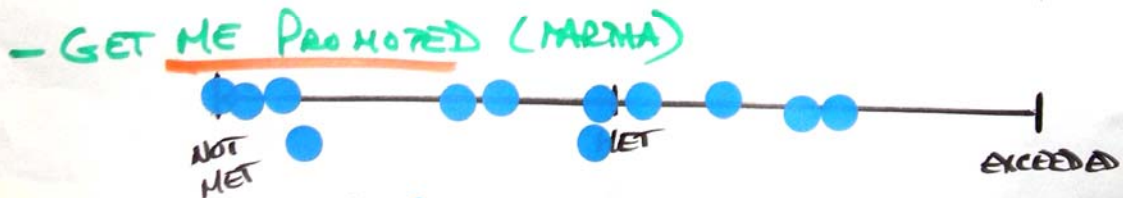
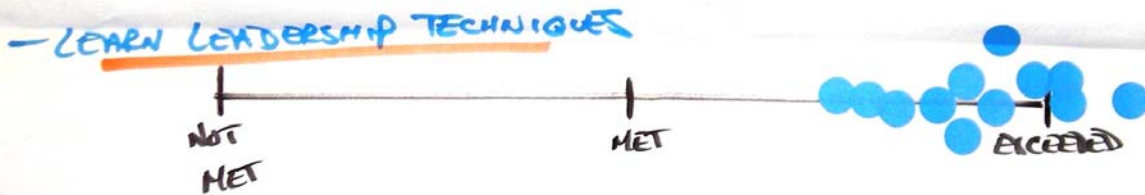
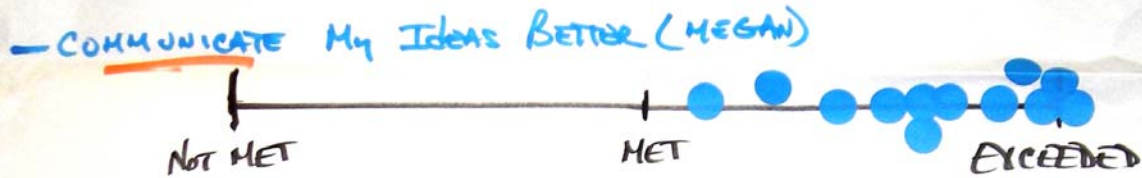
EVALUATION PROCEDURE

- At the beginning of the program, ask participants for their expectations, post them on a flip chart, record them, and file them.
- At the end of the program, post their expectations in the front of the room on a flip chart. Provide them with a line next to each expectation. Write in the three levels or anchors: NOT MET EXPECTATIONS, MET EXPECTATIONS, and EXCEEDED EXPECTATIONS.
- Ask them to come to the flip chart and place a sticky dot on each expectation, indicating if their expectations were not met, met, or exceeded.

AN EXAMPLE

Below is an evaluation used at the Extension leadership program called *Learning Today, Leading Tomorrow*, conducted with conservation districts in USDA Rural Development in Harrisburg. In this program, 12 people participated. Information on expectations were collected before the five sessions began and at the end. The following results emerged on the flip chart.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS - MET/NOT MET/EXCEEDED



ADVANTAGES

This kind of evaluation can

- be fun. It gets participants out of their seats and talking with others informally which raises the energy level of the class. Like other evaluations that use experiential activities, it is low in participant burden (see: <http://www.extension.psu.edu/evaluation/examples.html>).
- provide results that are easy to interpret.
- be valuable for the participants to see immediately.
- respond to the needs of each new group you teach and therefore, is flexible. In the group above, the expectation, getting promoted, stood out as an unexpected expectation. However, after that expectation emerged, it was woven into the marketing of the program with some target audiences.
- be private. Turn the flip chart away from the group, so that when someone places their sticky dots on the chart, it is not seen by the whole room.
- be a supplement to an evaluation that measures the educational objectives and what stakeholders want to know.

DISADVANTAGES

- The expectation of each participant is not necessarily salient to all participants. This could deflate some evaluation results.
- Some expectations overlap and seem to be measuring the same thing. If you think there is an overlap, consider consolidating these expectations, but there are pros and cons to that.
- This technique can be used successfully with a small to medium number in the class, about 10 to 25.
- Since different groups will have different expectations, the data can't be synthesized across programs.
- Some expectations, like an additional educational objective such as learning another skill, may not be possible to add to the curriculum at that time! The instructor, knowing at the beginning of the classes that a participant has this expectation, has an opportunity to explain to the participant personally, that that objective was not part of the description of the advertised course.

SUMMARY

McDavid believes that evaluating program objectives and what stakeholders want to know are important. Yet if Extension does not meet or exceed participant expectations, we fail.

For further information about the evaluation, contact gxm2@psu.edu.

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