



## Evaluating Community Outreach

**Ever wonder about an evaluation approach to use as you outreach to a black community; build a 4-H club in a Hispanic area; develop coalitions; or, create public policy debate?**

This type of project, often experimental, takes time to develop before you can evaluate for impact. Moreover, to achieve impacts it is critical to understand if your efforts are on target with the beneficiaries of the project.

The book, *Listen to the People*, presents an evaluation approach to serve program developers rather than stand in judgment. Used in urban and rural settings, it can be adapted to many contexts says author, Lawrence Salmen. Employing observation and conversational interviews at first, it draws on volunteers and non program personnel to gather information. This approach relies on the program developer's "ability to listen and to recognize the utility of issues arising in a particular context rather than on preformulated questionnaires or sophisticated statistical analysis" (p. 106). This evaluation approach recommends that you:

- Know the setting
- Adapt evaluation methods to the project and its needs
- Blend qualitative and quantitative information
- Focus on issues of concern to the program developer
- Be aware of program objectives, not bound to them
- Place a premium on establishing trust with beneficiaries
- Let evaluation serve as a bridge between program developer and beneficiaries
- Strive for reliability rather than precision
- Inject issues of concern into discussions with beneficiaries after winning their confidence
- Elaborate one or more simple surveys to help substantiate or determine what appear to be key findings

This evaluation approach can improve your community outreach or development efforts. Additionally, it can demonstrate to county commissioners and CEDs that you are interested in *long term* impact.

For more details see: Salmen, L.F. (1987). *Listen to the people*. New York: World Bank Oxford University Press. It is in Pattee Library at Penn State University: #HC185.E44S25.

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Available: <http://www.extension.psu.edu/evaluation/pdf/TS28.pdf>

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