



Adams County: Extension's Image

COUNTY EDUCATOR

Nina Redding, Adams County, Capital Region.

PROJECT and OBJECTIVES

The primary purpose of this project was to evaluate the current image of Penn State Cooperative Extension in the county and brainstorm ideas for future public relations. Members of the Extension Board and Public Relations Committee, comprised of agents and members of the Board, played an active role. This project also served as a leadership development opportunity for agents to know and work with Board members on an important extension goal.

EVALUATION STRATEGY

Community leaders representing a broad array of organizations, businesses or residents within the community were asked to participate in a focus group about extension's public relations. The leaders included representatives from health care, education, day care, non-profit and religious organizations, state and county government, agricultural sector, extension homemakers, 4-H and the Extension Board.

Due to the number of individuals participating and how different they were, two focus groups were created. Homogeneity in focus groups is likely to create an environment for more truthfulness and openness in the discussion. Group one was made up of individuals who have direct experience or knowledge about Extension (users). Group two included individuals with limited exposure or involvement with Extension (non-users). Both discussions were tape-recorded. Each participant was given a Penn State T-shirt and light refreshments as tokens of appreciation.

The first part of the evening (approximately 35 minutes) was devoted to "image" related questions about how Extension is perceived. The second 35-minute session consisted of questions pertaining to marketing and promotion of Extension (see below). So as not to bias the discussion, the committee chose moderators who were not known to the participants; the agents did not remain in the room but were there to greet the participants and offer refreshments.

The results, synthesized by the Public Relations Committee, revealed similarities and differences between the two groups of stakeholders; thus supporting the decision to have them in different discussion groups.

The Public Relations committee and the Extension Board used the results of the focus groups as intended, to propose changes on how to market extension programs. However, they found that the results revealed an unintended consequence; the focus groups saw the need to improve extension facilities. As a result, a future building committee emerged with strong sanction to move forward. Additionally, the results became the agenda at staff meetings; for example, the agents seriously evaluated the worth of daily radio programs and repeatedly discussed the importance of customer service, and new ideas were solicited from staff to continually improve service. And finally, the results became very important information for the county commissioners, a regional report and part of a dossier for promotion.

LETTER OF INVITATION TO FOCUS GROUPS

Month, Day, Year

Participant

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Dear xxxxxxx:

Penn State Cooperative Extension - Adams County would like to invite you to be a participant in a Public Relations Focus Group. Your role in the community as a (for example: day care provider or Extension Board member) makes you a valued member of our team. The purpose of the focus group is to bring together community leaders from across Adams County to talk about the current image of Penn State Cooperative Extension in the county and brainstorm future public relations efforts. No advance preparation or prior knowledge of Penn State Cooperative Extension is needed.

Your time commitment is just one and half-hours. The focus group will be held on **Monday evening, June 8, 7:00 - 8:30 p.m.** at the Penn State Extension Office in Adams County at 1135 Chambersburg Road, Gettysburg, PA 17325. Nina Redding, Extension Family Living Agent or Lela Reichart, Extension Agriculture Economic Development Agent will be calling next week to discuss your participation and you can ask any questions you have about the discussion at that time.

The Public Relations committee and the Extension Board will use the results of the discussions to decide how to market extension programs in the next five years.

For more than 80 years, Pennsylvanians have relied on Penn State Cooperative Extension for up-to-date information and new ways to solve individual and community problems. Extension, an arm of the Land-grant University, is funded cooperatively by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and state and county governments.

Thank you for considering helping Extension focus our public relations efforts in Adams County. Come join in the conversation, enjoy delicious refreshments and take home your Penn State T-shirt.

Sincerely,

William C. Kleiner
County Extension Director

cc: Adams County Extension Board of Directors Public Relations Committee:

Peggy Bear
Lela Reichart
Nina Redding

Kathy Nelson-Small
Beverly Stanton

DATA COLLECTION METHOD: FOCUS GROUPS

Adams County Extension Focus Group

June 8, 1998

7:00 - 7:10 PM

Welcome, Introductions, Purpose and Human Subjects Concerns

7:10 - 7:45 PM

Image Related Questions

WELL DESIGNED,
FOCUS GROUP
QUESTION

1. When I mention the words "Penn State Cooperative Extension in Adams County" what first comes to mind?
2. Please name any programs which you know exist through Extension outreach, or subject matter areas you know Extension offers programming. (Define what programming means.)

Handout "What is Cooperative Extension?"

Give participants a few minutes to read.

WELL DESIGNED,
FOCUS GROUP
QUESTION

- 3.a. If you have ever had contact with (before your invitation to participate in this focus group) or been involved with, or used educational materials or the services provided by the Adams County Office, briefly describe your contact, involvement or services.
- 3.b. If you have never had contact with or been involved with or used educational materials or the services provided by the Adams County Office, tell us why you think this has not happened.
4. If you said you did have contact with Extension, please comment on customer service. *(If the participants do not discuss these aspects below, probe for reactions by asking:)*

Were staff and agents courteous and helpful and how did they show this?

Did you receive assistance or information in a timely manner and can you give an example?

Was the information current - cutting edge and can you give an example?

If you visited the office, any comments on the facilities?

5. Have you ever participated in a Penn State Outreach program through Continuing or Distance Education and if so, what, and when?

WELL DESIGNED
QUESTION

6. How would you describe Cooperative Extension to a friend?

7:45 - 7:55 PM

Snacks

7:55 - 8:30 PM

Marketing Related Questions

WELL DESIGNED,
FOCUS GROUP
QUESTION

1. Think about any public relations methods Extension is using in the Adams/Hanover Area and describe any you can remember.
2. Consider if you have ever read an Extension related news column or seen an Extension related photograph in a local paper and if so, talk about the subject of it and when it occurred?
3. Adams County Cooperative Extension airs a 3 minute radio spot Monday - Friday around 12:30 PM on WGET. For the past year, if you have ever listened to one of the programs, tell us your reaction to it.
4. Considering the mission of Cooperative Extension here in the county, describe how Extension could reach more people to tell them of Extension's programs and services.
5. As a county resident, how would you and your family prefer to learn about an organization?
6. Can you suggest any names of persons who could be helpful to Extension in our efforts to promote our programs and services?

Please pass out T-shirts and thank participants for taking their time to help Penn State Cooperative Extension.

For further information about the evaluation, please contact Nina Redding <mailto:nlr2@psu.edu>. This Web site is copyrighted by the Pennsylvania State University. The information may be used for educational purposes but not sold for profit.