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Community Engagement and Programming Models for the 21st Century Extension Professional

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Cover Page Footnote

Purchasing Information Community Engagement for Extension Professionals: 21st Century Program Planning, Evaluation, and Professionalism is published by Wolf Xpress at North Carolina State University. 21st This guidebook is \$50.00 plus shipping. Copies of this guidebook, as well as shipping cost to the purchaser's location, may be obtained by contacting Wolf Xpress at wolf-xpress@ncsu.edu.

Community Engagement and Programming Models for the 21st Century Extension Professional

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Abstract. In this article, I review Donaldson's (2020) *Community Engagement for Extension Professionals: 21st Century Program Planning, Evaluation, and Professionalism*. This guidebook is relevant to several audiences including undergraduate and graduate students, Extension professionals, and faculty who work with students and advisees on program planning research and practice. This article highlights the primary contributions of the guidebook, with special emphasis on proactive and reactive Extension programming models.

INTRODUCTION

Community-university engagement models have evolved over the last 20 years and have helped universities redefine how they engage with other organizations and the public (Bruns & Franz, 2015). Land-grant universities and Cooperative Extension (Extension) systems serve as a historical example of community engagement between academic institutions and the individuals and organizations they serve (Kellogg Commission, 2001). Created in 1914, the Smith-Lever Act provides a framework whereby the federal government mandates that land-grant universities must extend their intellectual resources to their communities (Seevers & Graham, 2012). More recently, scholars have recognized Extension for its effective community-based program planning model—particularly how programming places stakeholders and community members at the center of planning efforts (Franz, 2014).

Scheer et al. (2006) identified ten core competencies for Extension professionals, and most, if not all, of these competencies are related to program planning. To develop and deliver quality Extension programs, Extension professionals must demonstrate mastery of activities that include conducting needs assessments, developing and implementing programs in response to identified needs, and evaluating programs (Cummings et al., 2015). Practitioners have documented how these planning activities (i.e., needs assessments and evaluation) can facilitate community engagement (Duffy et al., 2011).

A NEW GUIDEBOOK—THE CONTENTS AND INTENDED AUDIENCES

Community Engagement for Extension Professionals: 21st Century Program Planning, Evaluation, and Professionalism is a new resource that simultaneously considers community engagement and Extension program planning. Donaldson (2020, p. 11) developed this guidebook for three broad audiences and the following purposes:

- For undergraduate and graduate students to build their skills and knowledge for an Extension career.
- For Extension professionals (including agents, specialists, administrators, program and staff development personnel, and others) to enhance their skills at effective community engagement.
- For faculty to convey Extension best practices to students and advisees.

In nine concise chapters, Donaldson (2020) provides information and tips for advancing community engagement through Extension program planning. Chapters in the guidebook are:

1. Program Planning and Evaluation Model
2. Identify Issues
3. Plan
4. Deliver
5. Evaluate
6. Extension Reactive Programming Model
7. Performance Management for Extension Professionals
8. Community Engagement
9. Case Studies

Each chapter includes supplemental information presented in text boxes and questions to facilitate conversation or deeper exploration. The guidebook concludes with seven appendices that provide readers with ideas for implementing the program planning process in ways that meaningfully encourage community engagement. In this review, I highlight what I see as the primary contribution of this guidebook.

CONTRIBUTION

The guidebook presents two broad approaches to program planning—a proactive programming model and a reactive programming model—within North Carolina State Extension Service (NC State Extension). Over the last 50 years, Extension scholars and practitioners have developed numerous models and professional capacity-building resources related to program development and evaluation. Each model and various resources have delineated a collaborative process for planning, conducting, and evaluating Extension programs (Bennett & Rockwell, 1995; Boone et al., 1971; Franz et al., 2015; Wholey et al., 2004). Donaldson (2020) draws heavily on previous models to develop a four-step proactive Extension programming model (see Figure 1). The four dimensions of the proactive programming model are: identify issues, plan, deliver, and evaluate. Each dimension is defined by a set of action steps described in the new guidebook with numerous examples and resources.

The proactive programming model is what Caffarella, Daffron, and Cervero (2013) might refer to as conventional or traditional. In contrast, Donaldson (2020) presents a formal reactive programming model (Figure 2) as a practical approach to dealing with “real world” situations in program planning. For example, Extension professionals are often reacting to the questions, concerns, and motivations faced by consumers, farmers, homeowners, landowners, youth, and others. Since reactive programming is part of Extension professionals’ work, it is critically important to recognize that the programming process cannot always follow from needs assessment through evaluation. The reactive programming model has four dimensions: serve, provide, report, and follow-up. Donaldson (2020) defines these dimensions as a series of actions and provides detailed examples and resources.

A CRITIQUE

In *Community Engagement for Extension Professionals: 21st Century Program Planning, Evaluation, and Professionalism*, Donaldson (2020) acknowledges the complexities of planning Extension programs in diverse communities with various stakeholders to address society’s most challenging issues. He clearly articulates the need for two programming models but does not directly state that in some cases, an Extension professional may use both approaches in a community-engaged effort. As presented in the guidebook, an Extension professional would find themselves in either proactive programming *or* reactive programming. In actuality, an Extension professional could engage with community stakeholders, members, or other agency representatives using both models, whether simultaneously or in a stepwise approach. For example, a natural disaster may initially push Extension professionals into reactive programming activities. Yet, that same natural disaster could provide an opportunity for Extension to help individuals and communities increase their preparedness for future natural disasters (pro-

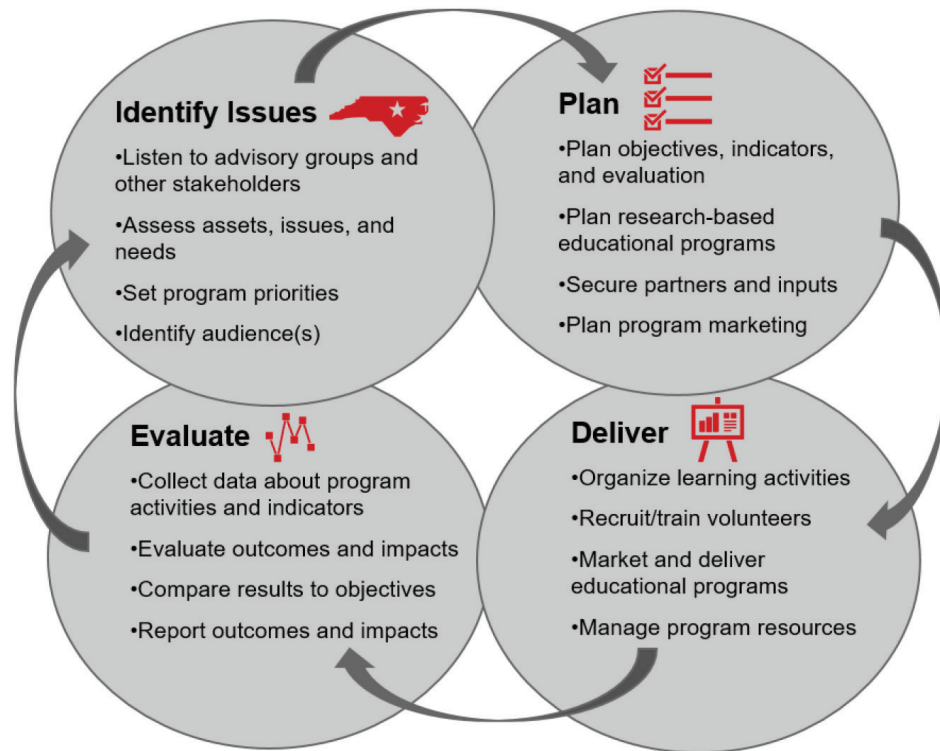


Figure 1. Extension proactive programming model. From *Community Engagement for Extension Professionals: 21st Century Program Planning, Evaluation, and Professionalism* (p. 16), by Donaldson, J. L., 2020, Wolf Express North Carolina State University. Copyright 2020 by Joseph L. Donaldson. Reprinted with permission.

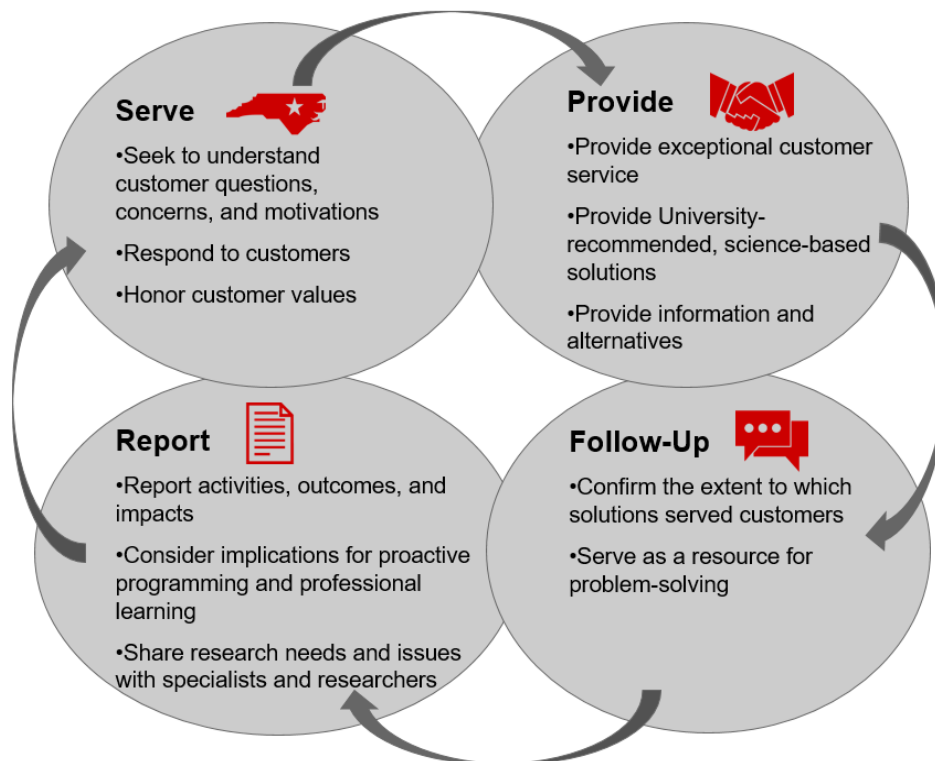


Figure 2. Extension reactive programming model. From *Community Engagement for Extension Professionals: 21st Century Program Planning, Evaluation, and Professionalism* (p. 56), by Donaldson, J. L., 2020, Wolf Express North Carolina State University. Copyright 2020 by Joseph L. Donaldson. Reprinted with permission.

active). A balance between proactive and reactive program planning could be ideal, because they achieve different outcomes (Decker & Anderson, 1989).

CONCLUSIONS

Although this guidebook is written specifically for NC State Extension professionals, the content is not state-specific. It includes examples from Extension 4-H youth development, agriculture and natural resources, community development, and family and consumer sciences programming. Resources—including a professional development plan template, discussion questions at the end of each chapter, two case studies involving dilemmas faced by Extension professionals, example program evaluation questionnaires, and techniques for engaging advisory groups—apply to Extension professionals and students interested in learning more about Extension.

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