

10-1-2019

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Recommended Citation

Epley, H. K. (2019). Action Steps and Tools for Managing a Statewide Curriculum Development Process. *Journal of Extension*, 57(5). Retrieved from <https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/joe/vol57/iss5/23>

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Action Steps and Tools for Managing a Statewide Curriculum Development Process

Abstract

Practical aspects of curriculum development, especially that involving multiple authors, often are overlooked, but they are critical to moving a curriculum from concept to finished product. The Ohio 4-H Camping Design Team developed a competency-model-based curriculum for training the state's 4-H teen camp counselors. The team incorporated action steps and associated management tools to facilitate the curriculum development process. Action steps included establishing a timeline, using a template, tracking progress, and conducting an internal review. The action steps and tools the team used can be replicated by others developing curricula, training programs, and other resources for Extension audiences.

Keywords: [curriculum development](#), [competency model](#), [camp counselor](#), [training](#)

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Introduction

Extension professionals are responsible for training individuals serving in a variety of volunteer roles. Having a training curriculum assists those who train these individuals and ensures that participants learn the information necessary to be successful. Developing a curriculum is a complex process that involves translating institution-level goals into documents and materials and preparing subject matter for educational use (Smith et al., 2017).

Literature on curriculum development includes discussions on theoretical grounding of a curriculum, integral elements of curriculum content, and starting points for building a curriculum, among other topics. Smith et al. (2017) proposed application of a curriculum development model. Other authors have noted that intentionally identifying and training individuals on desired skills and behaviors is important for achieving desired outcomes (Galloway, Bourdeau, Arnold, & Nott, 2013; VanWinkle, Busler, Bowman, & Manoogian, 2002). Authors also have suggested that curriculum developers can use focus group research (Benke et al., 2013), surveys (Smith, Meehan, & Dasher, 2009), literature reviews, and identification of societal needs (Smith et al., 2017) to inform curriculum development. Additionally, a competency model can be used as a curriculum development foundation (Byham & Moyer, 2005). Identifying competencies clarifies an individual's effective performance, which has an impact on an organization's or a program's outcomes (McClelland, 1973;

Stevens, 2012). Several authors (Brodeur, Higgins, Galindo-Gonzalez, Craig, & Haile, 2011; Epley, Ferrari, & Cochran, 2017) have reiterated the usefulness of a competency model as the starting point for curriculum development.

Obviously, discussions on curriculum development are wide ranging. However, practical aspects of curriculum development are often left out of these discussions. Yet these practical aspects are important for ensuring that a curriculum moves from concept to product, especially when many authors are involved in the development process. Using the experience of having coordinated development of a statewide camp counselor training curriculum and applying information set forth by Smith et al. (2017) as the foundation for the development process, I describe herein action steps and associated management tools that facilitated practical aspects of the work.

Curriculum Development Process

Ohio 4-H has design teams comprising professionals with expertise and knowledge in a particular subject area that are charged with developing curricula, training opportunities, evaluation instruments, and other resources related to their subject areas. Recognizing the important role camp counselors play in conducting quality youth programs, the Camping Design Team identified a need to develop a statewide camp counselor training curriculum, and I served as coordinator during the development process.

We used an existing competency model for teen camp counselors (Epley, 2014) as a starting point. When an organization uses its own competency model to develop a curriculum, the model is more easily customized to the organization's needs (Rothwell & Lindholm, 1999).

The curriculum needed to meet several practical considerations. It needed to

- be usable with different group sizes and in varied training formats, settings, and time periods;
- be cost effective;
- incorporate experiential learning model use;
- appeal to new and experienced professionals; and
- engage new and experienced learners.

Curriculum Development Action Steps

After soliciting experts who would develop the curriculum and identifying topics to include, we took these action steps:

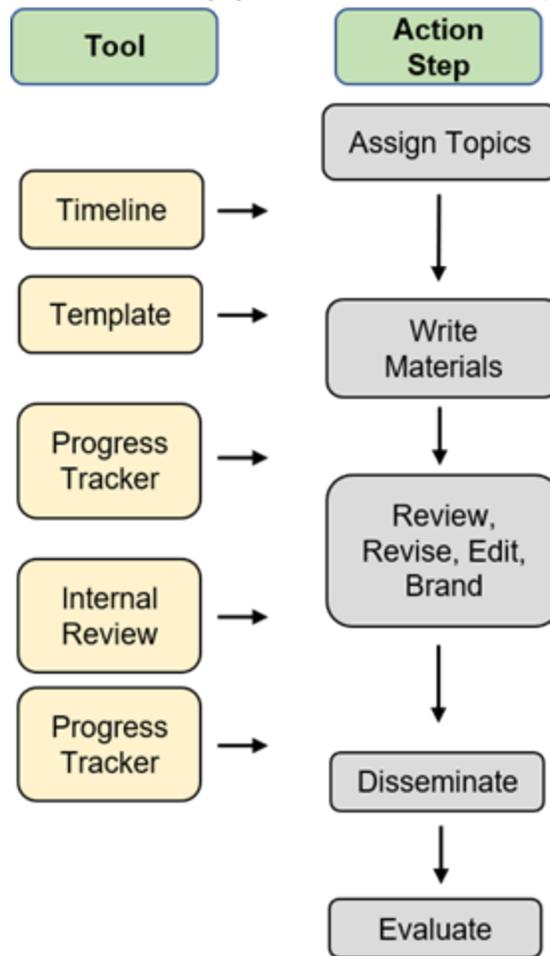
- *Assign topics.* On the basis of their interests and expertise, Camping Design Team members self-selected one or more topics from the comprehensive list.
- *Write lesson plans, resources, and other curriculum content.* Individuals gathered data and wrote draft lesson plans, supplemental information, and other resources related to their identified topics.

- *Review, revise, edit, and brand.* I packaged all items to undergo the state's blind peer review process. After receiving reviewers' feedback, the original authors edited their documents as needed. In accordance with an overarching recommendation, an editor reviewed the entire curriculum package to ensure one voice throughout all pieces in the curriculum. In compliance with university guidelines, appropriate college branding and graphics were added.
- *Disseminate.* We disseminated the curriculum at a statewide training. When individuals have an opportunity to experience curriculum components prior to teaching, anxiety decreases and confidence increases (Konen & Horton, 2000).
- *Evaluate.* Curriculum users received a questionnaire after a year of use. They were asked to indicate the curriculum's most useful components, their plans for future use of the curriculum, and whether they would recommend the curriculum to others. They also identified elements to add to the curriculum. This feedback helped the Camping Design Team members understand the curriculum's effectiveness and how to improve it.

I created several tools to manage the process more efficiently. Figure 1 depicts the tools in relation to the action steps, and the tools are described in the next section.

Figure 1.

Tool Use in Relation to Action Steps



Curriculum Development Management Tools

- *Timeline.* I created a timeline to assist individuals with managing their job duties throughout the process. The timeline included deadlines for document creation, internal and external peer review, and curriculum dissemination.
- *Template.* For consistency, I developed a template for team members to use when writing lesson plans and other curriculum components. The template included an overview of lesson information, such as the competencies covered, intended audience, objectives, time required, equipment and supplies needed, and actions to take prior to instruction. In addition, the template included headings for sections on background on the topic, activity instructions, reflection, and application. Figure 2 shows the template layout.

Figure 2.
Lesson Plan Template

Title *(Arial, size 28, bold)*

Main Competency:

- Select one from the list below—what is the main competency this lesson covers?

Other Competencies:

delete those not covered

- Child and Adolescent Development Knowledge (1)
- Communication (2)
- Cultural Awareness (3)
- Health, Wellness, and Risk Management (4)
- Personal Commitment (5)
- Professional Development (6)
- Professionalism (7)
- Program Planning (8)
- Role Model (9)
- Self-Direction (10)
- Supportive Relationships (11)
- Teaching and Facilitating (12)
- Teamwork and Leadership (13)
- Thinking and Problem Solving (14)
- Understands Organizational and Camp Environment (15)

Intended Audience:

- Camp Counselors

Lesson Objectives:

Participants will:

- (Insert objectives here)

Time: X minutes

Equipment and Supplies:

- List supplies needed

Do Ahead:

- Review lesson
- Gather equipment and supplies
- Add other items here.

Prepared by:

Name, Title

BACKGROUND

[Header in all caps, Arial, size 11, bold, key in one 'Enter' between paragraphs]

Give a brief overview and background of this topic—WHY is it important?

Teaching counselors how to develop... *[Arial, Size 11]*

WHAT TO DO *[Header]*

Arrange the room so...

Activity: [Subhead all lower case except first letter, colon]

- Today we are going to... Give an overview of what to do—this is your actual lesson.
- *[If using multiple inset bullets, use the type of bullets demonstrated below.]* Bullet points if needed to give a "play by play" of the activity.
 - Examples:
 - For campers to...

TALK IT OVER *[Header]*

Reflect: [Subhead]

This is an example of how to... Add reflection questions here. These should allow the group to process what just happened.

•

What additional things should we consider as we get ready to teach this plan?

- Have a rain plan...

•

Apply:

As each of you plan and teach your sessions at camp, use these points to conduct a dynamic and fun session for your campers... Add what participants should do after they leave. What are you challenging them to do?

Add addendums and other handouts on subsequent pages of this document, so they are included in one total document; it will just have multiple pages



- *Progress tracker.* Team members submitted their drafts to me. I sent deadline reminders and tracked necessary information, including
 - topic area,
 - author,
 - item title,
 - draft completion date,
 - peer review assignment,
 - peer review completion date, and
 - final completion date.

- *Internal peer review.* For each item, I assigned another Camping Design Team member as a peer reviewer. I asked reviewers to assess readability, content, and utility (Coleman, Byrd-Bredbenner, Baker, & Bowen, 2011). We did not assess the evaluation component because there was an overall evaluation piece for the curriculum. Team members submitted their reviews, and I provided the original authors with suggested revisions. This review took place prior to the external review to strengthen the quality of the curriculum. The original authors revised items according to suggested edits and returned the final documents to me.

Conclusion

The action steps and management tools highlighted herein are useful during the curriculum development process. Extension professionals can apply them when developing curricula and training programs for audiences such as master gardeners, master naturalists, 4-H club volunteers, and camp directors.

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