

6-1-2013

Improving Extension Programs: Putting Public Value Stories and Statements to Work

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Recommended Citation

Franz, N. K. (2013). Improving Extension Programs: Putting Public Value Stories and Statements to Work. *The Journal of Extension*, 51(3), Article 9. <https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/joe/vol51/iss3/9>

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Improving Extension Programs: Putting Public Value Stories and Statements to Work

Abstract

Extension has begun to embrace the public value movement that originated in public administration circles. The motivation appears to be driven by external accountability rather than internal interest in improving programming and results. The development of public value statements and stories can be used throughout the program cycle and for other program and professional tasks to help address internal and external cries for the articulation of public value. Extension workers should use public value statements and stories in their work on a daily basis in a variety of ways to enhance their effectiveness and the transformative impact of their programs.

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The public value movement found throughout public administration has spread to Extension work in the last decade. As a result, numerous presentations and workshops have been conducted to help Extension staff learn the differences between private and public value derived from programming and how to measure and articulate public value through the creation of impact statements and stories. (Franz, 2011; Kalambokidis, 2004; Kalambokidis 2011).

The focus on public value in Extension work appears to be externally fueled by accountability requirements rather than an internal norm to improve Extension programming. Public value should be included in a variety of ways in the Extension programming cycle and related products to improve programming processes and results.

Figure 1 shows that Extension educators approach programming in a variety of ways. This model focuses on "process" and "content" as the determinants of approaches to Extension work. Process refers to the ways educational programs are delivered. Content refers to the information shared to drive a learner's change in knowledge or behavior. Combining these two determinants creates four domains describing approaches to Extension work (Franz & Townson, 2008).

Figure 1.
Extension Educational Approaches

		CONTENT	
		LOW	HIGH
P R O C E S S	HIGH	FACILITATION (community issues strategic planning)	TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION (ag profitability, parenting, youth obesity)
	LOW	SERVICE (committees, soil and pressure canner tests)	CONTENT TRANSMISSION (fact sheets, web sites, newsletters, curriculum)

Public value most often is realized through the transformative education approach to Extension work. Social, economic, and environmental condition changes desired for public value require transformative education practices, including critical events and critical reflection (Franz, Garst, Baughman, Smith, & Peters 2009). However, Extension workers sometimes fail to use transformative approaches to realize public value. They also fail to measure and articulate program value in spite of a variety of potential uses of public value statements and stories to improve programming and gain recognition for their good work.

Program Improvement and Public Value Stories and Statements

Most Extension systems have been creating public value statements and stories for reporting program impact to stakeholders. The development of these stories requires strong and persistent leadership to help staff and faculty change because measuring and articulating public value requires an intentional process and behavior changes that can take time (Franz, 2011; Kalambokidis, 2004; Kalambokidis, 2011). Public value stories and statements can be used in many important ways to improve programming by:

- Framing questions for program needs assessment and environmental scanning
- Selecting programs to develop based on the importance of the issue for the public and the organizational capacity available to deliver it
- Building public value into program design using logic models to set condition outcomes (i.e., public value) and determine what outcomes will be measured
- Including time in program delivery to reflect on and measure the public value of the program

- Conducting and analyzing data after the program to determine anticipated and unanticipated public value

Specific daily uses of public value statements and stories include:

- Media releases
- Policy change proposals
- Reports and publications
- Conference presentation and poster proposals
- Volunteer recruitment
- Partnership development
- Web content
- Grants, contracts, and other funding proposals
- Awards and recognition nominations
- Marketing materials
- Talks, speeches, and brag points
- Promotion, tenure, and reclassification dossiers and annual performance reports
- Celebrations, including stories for retirement parties

Public value statements and stories have three important elements: 1) the relevance or issue being addressed, 2) the response by Extension to the issue, and the 3) results of the program including the public value. Templates are often created for statewide consistency in data aggregation and reporting (Boyer et al., 2009; Franz 2011). Statements tend to be a few sentences long, while stories are about a page in length and contain more details for each section.

Lessons Learned About Public Value Statements and Stories

Best practices and lessons learned about creating and using public value statements and success stories have some parallels with those discovered through efforts to improve impact reporting. These lessons include hiring staff or faculty specifically to measure and articulate public value; training administrators, faculty, and staff; providing individual and small group technical assistance; developing reporting tools; and tying public value reporting to performance and recognition (Franz & McCann, 2007).

Specific best practices have been documented related to public value articulation. These include creating clear examples of the differences between public and private value derived from Extension programs, creating the case for and urgency of focusing on public value, listing and prioritizing the unit's public values, and using both public value statements and stories depending on the audience and venue (Franz, 2011). Kalambokidis (2004, 2011) also found the importance of working with Extension program teams to develop public value statements and the benefit of developing multiple drafts of public value statements in workshops, having those statements reviewed by applied economists, and working with program teams to revise their public value statements based on feedback and preparing to present their statements to peers.

All Extension units and employees develops their own best practices regarding the development and use of public value statements and stories over time to fit their context. It is critical that not every program or educational activity becomes subject to a public value lens. Some efforts are best described as service or tradition that is compelling to continue for other types of impact. Private value derived from programming may be appropriate for clients who can afford to pay all costs related to the program. Some Extension workers have found they enjoy working with others on public value when it is not their personal strength.

Summary

Extension has begun to embrace the public value movement that originated in public administration circles. The motivation behind participation in this movement appears to be driven by external accountability rather than internal interest in improving programming and results. The development of public value statements and stories can be used throughout the program cycle and for other program and professional tasks to help address internal and external cries for the articulation of public value. Extension workers should use public value statements and stories in their work on a daily basis in a variety of ways to enhance their effectiveness and the transformative impact of their programs.

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