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Graduation: From National Initiative to Base Program



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Graduation: From National Initiative to Base Program

Abstract

The Cooperative Extension System supports base programs and national initiatives that provide direction for educational programming across the country. This article presents results of a study of the graduation of the CYFAR National Initiative into base programs. The Organizational Change Survey, designed to document the current state of and changes in a state's ability to develop and sustain effective programs for children, youth, and families, was first conducted in late 1997 to mid-1998 and was repeated in late 2000 to mid-2001. Results are presented from 22 states that participated both times. Implications for the implementation and graduation of other national initiatives are discussed.

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The Cooperative Extension System supports base programs and national initiatives that help provide direction for educational programming across the country. Base programs and national initiatives are supported by the Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service (CSREES) and by the state partners (Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service Base Programs, <<http://www.reeusda.gov/1700/programs/baseprog.htm>>). National initiatives give special programming emphasis to issues that are of national importance and attention, and have about a 5-year life. Base programs support the seven major areas in which the Cooperative Extension Service provides educational programming:

- 4-H Youth Development; Agriculture;
- Community Resources and Economic Development;
- Family Development and Resource Management;
- Leadership and Volunteer Development;
- Natural Resources and Environment Management; and
- Nutrition, Diet and Health (Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service Base Programs, <<http://www.reeusda.gov/1700/programs/baseprog.htm>>).

Keys to Successful Graduation

A search of the *Journal of Extension* revealed several themes relating to the graduation of programs and initiatives as they move from one level to the next. The need to coordinate and construct strategic coalitions and partnerships, and the need for a common vision, commitment, and understanding are key factors that influence the likelihood that an Initiative will develop from infancy into base programming.

Williams (1997) presents internal and external factors related to the success of the Decisions for

Health Initiative. The internal factors are administrative support and specialist leadership. External factors relate to the changing societal conditions. Williams (1997) persuasively argues for the importance of strategic coalitions for efforts to develop solutions to community problems and issues. Not only do strategic coalitions represent the most effective method for achieving desired outcomes and hence positively affecting an initiative's progress towards sustainability, they also ensure that key players involved with programmatic efforts have the needed information needed to move the program forward (Banach & Gregory, 2001).

These strategic partnerships, whether grassroots organizations, specialist leaderships, funding agencies, or community leaders, once linked and strategically networked together, provide valuable insights into how a programmatic response, or initiative, should be constructed or changed over time. Strategic coalitions providing valuable information at key points in an initiative's life cycle is especially important because key tasks, core questions, skills needed, and communication loops may differ according to whether a program is in infancy or has graduated to base programming (Banach & Gregory, 2001).

Another broad theme involves the necessity of program designers to provide a clear vision, with strong commitment and clearly articulated goals. Banach and Gregory (2001), in one of the most clearly articulated "road maps" of initiative graduation, stress the importance of having a clear vision, a strong commitment, and well-defined roles at each stage of a program's life. These factors help ensure a "realistic optimism" necessary for continual graduation of programs to the ultimate goal of sustainability.

However, it is not enough to merely enunciate a clear vision, an awareness of a program's life course must be considered as well. Kraft (2001) notes the importance of engaging key partners in a long-term vision-producing process early in the implementation process. Moreover, articulating a clear vision while incorporating valuable information from strategic partners at each stage of an initiative's life cycle ensures that it will expand and thrive. And a strong commitment by the state to implement and see the initiative through ensures that a clear vision be continually refreshed in response to an ever-changing social landscape.

These broad themes stress what is necessary for a program to succeed, transition toward sustainability, and ultimately graduate into base programming in which the initiative becomes institutionalized into daily social practice. There is little discussion, however, of how the institutional landscape changes once the initiative has graduated to the final desirable level. This article builds on the literature by providing empirical support for changes that occur once a program has graduated to base programming, while providing some lessons and implications applicable to other programmatic responses in the future.

A Practical Example

Established in 1994, the Children, Youth and Families At Risk (CYFAR) National Initiative was Cooperative Extension's response to conditions in America that place children and their families at risk. Strategic planners recognized that significant organizational changes were needed to achieve positive outcomes for children, youth, and families at risk and to evaluate the organizational system (4-H National Strategic Business Plan, 1991; Home Economics Sub-Committee, ECOP, 1990; Sadowske & Adrian, 1990; Search Institute, 1993; Strategic Directions of the Cooperative Extension System, 1990; Strategic Planning Council, ECOP, 1990).

Niche expansion seemed to be an accurate description of Extension's position at the time of the CYFAR Initiative. An organization must evolve along with the larger society to remain effective (Zammuto, 1982). Over time, effective organizations satisfy their constituents through niche expansion, a process that may involve expansion to include new constituencies. While Cooperative Extension continued to satisfy its traditional constituents, that constituency may be shrinking as a proportion of the U.S. population. Thus, a larger group had yet to benefit fully from the system's resources. There was a mixed reception within the system to these changes due to the fact that in some areas, the old niche was still a comfortable fit, while in others it was not. Such diversity of experience added richness to the organization, but may also have complicated the process of developing and communicating a shared vision at all levels in the system.

The Initiative was graduated into base programs in 1999. The mission of the CYFAR Program is:

To marshal resources of the Land-Grant and Cooperative Extension Systems to collaborate with other organizations to develop and deliver educational programs that equip limited resource families and youth who are at risk for not meeting basic human needs with skills needed to lead positive, productive, contributing lives.

CSREES provides funding and support to the states for three objectives, all directed toward the CYFAR mission (2002 CYFAR Request For Applications, Program Announcement, <<http://www.reeusda.gov/4h/cyfar/>>:

- Building Statewide Extension capacity,
- Supporting community-based projects, and
- Integrating CYFAR programming into Extension's base programs.

Related to these objectives, CSREES staff convened a work group to write a CYFAR philosophy that

included six components of organizational change. These were seen as central to the achievement of the CYFAR mission, especially in terms of strategies to build statewide Extension capacity to support this work:

1. Develop and implement a common vision and strategic plan for programming for children, youth and families at risk.
2. Train, support and reward Extension salaried and volunteer staff for implementing programs which accomplish the CYFAR mission.
3. Recognize Extension professionals as critical resources in research and education for children, youth, families and community issues.
4. Promote diversity, inclusivity and pluralism in Extension programs and staff.
5. Promote [internal] collaborations of Extension 4-H, Family and Consumer Science, Agriculture, Community Development, and other university departments in programming for children, youth and families at risk across the state.
6. Promote and join [external] collaborations of community, county, state and federal agencies and organizations to strengthen programs and policy for children, youth and families.

This article presents the results of a study of the graduation of one National Initiative into base programs, focusing on the above six organizational components with an examination of sustainability of program efforts. Implications for the implementation and graduation of other National Initiatives are discussed.

Method

The Organizational Change Survey assesses the six components listed above. Each component was operationally defined with a number of measurable survey items. In October 1998, the University of Arizona published the report, *National Results of the Organizational Change Survey* (Betts, Marczak, Peterson, Sewell, & Lipinski, 1998, <<http://ag.arizona.edu/fcr/fs/cyfar/>>). That report included data from 42 states that were collected between September 1997 and July 1998 from all paid Extension professionals in the state who worked directly or indirectly with children, youth and families. It provided a snapshot of the state of Extension during the late 1997 and early 1998 time period with regard to its organizational ability to support programming for children, youth and families at risk. National and state trends were reported and organized by the six components.

Three years later, August 2000 to May 2001, this survey was repeated. The survey was changed slightly in Round 2 to reflect feedback received after its first implementation and system changes. Specific references to the Children, Youth and Families At Risk (CYFAR) National Initiative were replaced with phrases referring to children, youth and families at risk in general or simply removed as appropriate.

Eligible respondents included all paid Extension professionals in the community, county region, area, and university who work directly or indirectly with children, youth, and families. Individuals in nonpaid positions and Extension professionals who work primarily on unrelated issues were excluded. Respondents were identified by code number only. Each state collected data and forwarded it the University of Arizona, where the data sets were aggregated and analyzed. Twenty-two states submitted data that are included in this report.

Analyses

T-tests were performed on data from each state to detect significant differences in the mean responses between Rounds 1 and 2. If there were no statistical differences between the data from Rounds 1 and 2, the state is considered to have maintained their previous level of support on that item. If there was a significant increase at the $p < .05$ level, the state is considered to have significantly increased its capacity, while trend level increase (or approaching significance) is where the probability is greater than .05 but less than .10. The same procedure was used for those states that showed either a significant or approaching significant decrease in capacity.

Respondent Characteristics

Of the 24 states that completed Round 2, 22 states also participated in Round 1:

- Arizona,
- Delaware,
- Florida,
- Georgia,
- Idaho,
- Iowa,
- Kentucky,
- Massachusetts,

Statewide Commitments	17	0	17	4	0	1	1
Statewide Strategic Plans	6	1	7	13	2	0	2
Research Base	8	1	9	12	1	0	1
Respondents' Personal Understanding of State Vision	12	1	13	9	0	0	0
Respondents' Personal Work from a Strategic Plan	3	0	3	14	4	1	5
^a Significant: $p < .05$. Approaching Significant: $.05 < p < .10$. Maintained: no significant difference.							

Component 2 is concerned with training, supports and rewards for staff and volunteers. Table 2 presents data on perceived administrative and campus support. Supervisor support for allocation of time and priorities to work with at risk audiences when there are conflicting demands rose dramatically. Fourteen states reported increases, 12 states reported significant differences at the $p < .05$ level and an additional 2 states reported trend level increases ($p < .10$). The other 8 states maintained supervisor support; no states decreased in this area. All 22 states reported either maintained or increased allocation of financial resources for work with children, youth and families at-risk.

Table 2.

Component 2: Number of States That Increased, Maintained, or Decreased the Capacity for Extension Services Regarding Administrative and Campus Support ^a

Item	Increased			Main- tained Total	Decreased		
	Signifi- cant	Approach- ing Signifi- cant	Total		Signifi- cant	Approach- ing Signifi- cant	Total
Staff Recognition	2	0	2	17	2	1	3
Allocated Resources	8	0	8	14	0	0	0
Supervisor Support	12	2	14	8	0	0	0
Campus Support	5	1	6	11	5	0	5
^a Significant: $p < .05$. Approaching Significant: $.05 < p < .10$. Maintained: no significant difference.							

Table 3 reports the status of training received. The large majority of states maintained or increased the participation of respondents in all training topic areas. Specifically, 21 of the 22

states either maintained (13) or increased (8) the number of respondents who reported good or excellent overall training and staff development opportunities.

Table 3.

Component 2: Number of States That Increased, Maintained, or Decreased the Capacity for Extension Services Regarding Participation in Training by Topic Area ^a

Item	Increased			Main- tained Total	Decreased		
	Signifi- cant	Approach- ing Signifi- cant	Total		Signifi- cant	Approach- ing Signifi- cant	Total
Finding Resources	4	0	4	16	2	0	2
Principles of Collaboration	2	1	3	17	1	1	2
Impact of Values	3	2	5	16	1	0	1
Empowering Community	4	2	6	16	0	0	0
Research-Based Information	5	2	7	14	0	1	1
Recruiting Volunteers	5	1	6	14	2	0	2
Evaluation	9	0	9	8	4	1	5
Organizational Change	3	1	4	15	2	1	3
Use of Computers	2	0	2	17	3	0	3
Electronic Communication	0	1	1	15	4	2	6

^a Significant: $p < .05$. Approaching Significant: $.05 < p < .10$. Maintained: no significant difference.

Questions regarding Internet use were added in Round 2, so comparison with Round 1 is not possible on many questions. However, both rounds asked about frequency of use of the CYFERnet Web site. Chi-square analysis found significant differences between the two Rounds, with definite movement from less to more frequent use ($P^2=160.687$, $df=4$, $p < .000$). In Round 1, 76% of the respondents accessed CYFERnet once a year or never; in Round 2, this fell to 66%. The greatest increase between rounds was in the category "Every Few Months."

Component 3 is concerned with the degree to which Extension professionals are recognized as critical resources in research and education for children, youth, and family issues. Table 4 presents the data for five items, all of which show most states either maintained or increased the number of respondents who reported good or excellent knowledge in principles of positive development, risk and resilience factors, programming for at-risk audiences, and obtaining resources to support

programs. The fifth item documents that 19 of the 22 states either maintained (16 states) or increased (3 states) in the percentage of respondents who are called upon at least monthly for their expertise.

Table 4.

Component 3: Number of States That Increased, Maintained, or Decreased the Capacity for Extension Services Regarding Knowledge of Issues Key to Programming for Children, Youth and Families At Risk^a

Item	Increased			Main- tained Total	Decreased		
	Signifi- cant	Approach- ing Signifi- cant	Total		Signifi- cant	Approach- ing Signifi- cant	Total
Principles of Positive Development	3	0	3	16	2	1	3
Risk and Resilience Factors	3	0	3	17	1	1	2
Programming for At-Risk Audiences	4	0	4	16	2	0	2
Obtaining Resources and Funds to Support Programs	5	1	6	16	0	0	0
Called Upon at Least Monthly for Expertise	3	0	3	16	3	0	3

^a Significant: $p < .05$. Approaching Significant: $.05 < p < .10$. Maintained: no significant difference.

Table 5 presents data regarding evaluation knowledge and practice. Sixteen states showed an increase in respondents involved in evaluation. The other six states maintained this involvement from Round 1; no states reported a decrease in those doing evaluation.

Table 5.

Component 3: Number of States That Increased, Maintained, or Decreased the Capacity for Extension Services Regarding Evaluation^a

Item	Increased			Main- tained Total	Decreased		
	Signifi- cant	Approach- ing Signifi- cant	Total		Signifi- cant	Approach- ing Signifi- cant	Total
Knowledgeable About Evaluation	4	1	5	15	1	1	2

Currently Involved in Evaluation	14	2	16	6	0	0	0
^a Significant: $p < .05$. Approaching Significant: $.05 < p < .10$. Maintained: no significant difference.							

Table 6 presents data regarding knowledge of and involvement with policy. Nearly 76% of the respondents believe that one of their roles is to educate policymakers on children, youth, and family issues. This rate was maintained for 16 states and increased from Round 1 for four states. However, only 26% of the respondents indicate they have good or excellent knowledge of policy and legislation, with only three states reporting improvement since Round 1, two states reporting a decrease, and 17 states maintaining the status quo.

Table 6.

Component 3: Number of States That Increased, Maintained, or Decreased the Capacity for Extension Services Regarding Policy and Legislation^a

Item	Increased			Main- tained Total	Decreased		
	Signifi- cant	Approach- ing Signifi- cant	Total		Signifi- cant	Approach- ing Signifi- cant	Total
Knowledgeable About Policy and Legislation	2	1	3	17	0	2	2
Educating Policymakers is One of my Roles	2	2	4	16	2	0	2
^a Significant: $p < .05$. Approaching Significant: $.05 < p < .10$. Maintained: no significant difference.							

Component 4 is concerned with diversity, inclusivity, and pluralism. Again, maintenance of or improvements in this area are evident from the data in Tables 7, 8, and 9. Diversity is treated as a critical issue in all 22 states, with most states reporting that hiring staff and volunteers from populations not historically a part of Extension was a priority. Most states also report a great deal of work with diverse audiences; this was maintained or increased since Round 1. Twenty states reported maintained or increased skill in working with diverse audiences, and all 22 states reported maintained or increased comfort in working with diverse audiences.

Table 7.

Component 4: Number of States That Increased, Maintained, or Decreased the Capacity for Extension Services Regarding Status of Diversity^a

Item	Increased			Main- tained Total	Decreased		
	Signifi- cant	Approach- ing Signifi- cant	Total		Signifi- cant	Approach- ing Signifi- cant	Total
General Status of Diversity	1	1	2	18	1	1	2
Programming	1	2	3	17	1	1	2

Collaboration Worth the Effort	6	1	7	13	2	0	2
Engage Program Participants	4	3	7	14	1	0	1
Participation in Community Task Forces	1	2	3	16	2	1	3
Work with Outside Groups Influences Extension Work	1	3	4	15	3	0	3
Provision of Resources Necessary to Collaborate	2	2	4	16	1	1	2
^a Significant: $p < .05$. Approaching Significant: $.05 < p < .10$. Maintained: no significant difference.							

Discussion and Implications

There is much to be learned from these results that can be applied to the graduation of future National Initiatives. As Banach and Gregory (2001) and Kraft (2001) point out, clear vision, a strong commitment, and well-defined roles are critical to program success. Not only how we work, but who we serve has changed, redefining our niche. Data collected in Round 2, after the graduation of the CYFAR Initiative into base programs, indicate that gains are being maintained or strengthened in most of the 22 states that participated in these areas:

- Statewide commitment to this work,
- Individuals' personal understanding of their states' visions,
- Supervisor support,
- Current involvement in evaluation.

Two areas where more emphasis is needed are:

- Use of the Internet as a tool, and
- Increased knowledge of policy and legislation.

It is recommended that this survey be repeated again in 3 years to measure increased, decreased, or sustained support. This will provide data at three critical points: 2 years after the CYFAR Initiative was created, 1 year after it was graduated into base programs, and 4 years after graduation. Ideally, baseline data would have been collected before the implementation of the initiative. Lessons about strategies used to successfully integrate this initiative into base programs may be learned through follow-up interviews with key stakeholders.

The broader implications and lessons learned from this study may influence other National Initiatives and their successful graduation into base programs:

- Explicitly state desired change and organizational support needed for an initiative.
- Write operational definitions of strategies and desired outcomes to make them measurable.
- Consider sustainability of initiative from the beginning, not at the end of the 5 years.
- Fund evaluation of system change to provide feedback, inform stakeholders, make mid-course corrections, and plan for sustainability.
- Collect baseline data before the implementation of a new initiative.
- Encourage use of the data at the state and national levels.
- Provide organizational support for the front line staff in terms of training, supervisor support, understanding of the initiative and the goal, other resources.

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