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## Keeping a Traditional Program-Delivery Method in an "E" World

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## Keeping a Traditional Program-Delivery Method in an "E" World

### Abstract

Advances in communication technology have changed how agents deliver programs and work with clientele. The electronic world makes it very easy for educational information to be delivered quickly and efficiently. These advances must be regarded as program-delivery improvements. However, communication technology has also reduced the amount of face-to-face, personal contact with and among clientele, which used to be a hallmark of Extension work. Can we keep the face-to-face benefits while going forward in an "e" world?

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As we enter the twenty-first century, advances in communication technology have changed how agents deliver programs and work with clientele. The electronic world makes it very easy for educational information to be delivered quickly and efficiently. These advances must be regarded as program-delivery improvements. However, communication technology has also reduced the amount of face-to-face, personal contact with and among clientele, which used to be a hallmark of Extension work.

### Questions About Benefits & Value

Can we keep some face-to-face benefits while going forward in an "e" world?

Let's look at just one traditional form of face-to-face clientele contact. Extension-related committee meetings held in the homes of clientele have gone the way of the crank telephone. This trend has been fueled not only by improved communication and delivery technology, but also by the availability of more transportation in rural areas of the country, the consolidations of schools, an increase in dual income and career families, and changes in the sociology of the family.

Has Extension programming thereby lost something that is of intrinsic value?

No matter what the causes, there is probably general agreement that entertaining and home hospitality are becoming a lost art in society overall. Using public meeting facilities or having a meeting room as part of the Extension office is seen as a way of making Extension agents' lives easier.

If we as agents have gained something, have the clientele lost something?

Clearly, I believe the answer to all my questions is "yes." Yes, we can--and we should--keep the face-to-face benefits. Yes, Extension programming has lost something intrinsically valuable. And yes, our clientele have lost something, too.

### The Value of Holding Home Meetings

Holding Extension committee meetings in clientele homes is of value for a number of reasons.

### Teaches Diversity & Tolerance

Developing greater understanding is the only way diversity and tolerance can grow. Especially in this day of more heterogeneous committees, when groups meet in homes, a great deal of diversity training can be accomplished, if not by specific design, then just by circumstances.

As committee members meet each other's spouses and family members, they gain more understanding of fellow members as people like themselves. Seemingly vast and unbridgeable differences in cultural or ethnic backgrounds are reduced when seen in the more personal, "human" setting of the home.

### **Strengthens Committees**

When people experience how others live, they feel they are more a part of the group. The hosts feel acceptance because others are willing to come to their homes. The meetings, themselves, and the reasons for them become more personal to each member and are not just experienced as the usual institutional-type meetings. Committee members thus become more receptive to ideas.

### **Encourages Long-Term Relationships**

Some Extension programming can and should be done on a long-term basis. The relationships built among committee members who participate in home-hosted meetings are much more likely to become long-term relationships. And this provides a firm foundation for longer term Extension programming.

### **Provides Opportunity for Sociability/Hospitality**

When clientele host meetings in their homes, they learn how to welcome guests and be hospitable. Having all members of the group take turns hosting meetings allows them to develop these skills. Many times this is the only opportunity our clientele may have to learn or practice them. Creating an environment where people are comfortable and where people feel welcome leaves a positive attitude in attendees and hosts, alike.

### **Encourages Family Development**

Parents can use the opportunity to teach hospitality and manners to their children. Further, they can also make hosting the group a total family effort. And such opportunities are becoming more rare in our "e" world.

## **Recapturing the Value**

If we, as Extension professionals, keep these benefits in mind, I believe we can recapture what has been lost. This applies whether it is a 4-H club, a county cattlemen's group, a parenting group, or the County Extension Advisory committee.

As Extension agents, with our great ingenuity, we can surely find ways to fit the home meeting back into at least some Extension programming. We can:

- Discuss hosting meetings with volunteers to explore implementation of this concept.
- Ask farmers to host a field day.
- Host a group in our own homes, and set an example.
- Encourage clientele to be in charge of hosting meetings, if not in their homes, then at a public facility or meeting room.

Extension has a history of being not only a deliverer of information but also a conduit for learning social and interaction skills. Since Extension was founded, we have helped people develop tolerance, understand diversity, build community, learn hospitality, and enjoy stronger family units. We do not have to lose these values in our "e" world.

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