

Measuring Extension's Performance in the Age of Engagement

*A White Paper Prepared for the
Association of Southern Region Extension Directors (ASRED)
and the Association of Extension Administrators (AEA)
By the Southern Region Indicator Work Group*

*Roger Rennekamp, University of Kentucky, Co-Chair
Scott Cummings, Texas A&M University, Co-Chair
Thelma Feaster, North Carolina A&T University
Howard Ladewig, University of Florida
Mike Lambur, Virginia Tech
Michael Newman, Mississippi State University
Greg Price, University of Georgia
Robert Richard, Louisiana State University
Paul Warner, University of Kentucky, Administrative Advisor*

The *Report of the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land Grant Universities* rekindled an age-old debate regarding what constitutes an appropriate service or outreach mission for such institutions. The commission concluded that public universities must renew their commitment to communities and better serve the needs of society.

Many within the Cooperative Extension System would contend that Cooperative Extension has never abandoned its commitment to serving the needs of communities and still delivers relevant high quality programs. That notion was explicitly communicated in the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy's (ECOP) *Vision for the 21st Century*.

Defining Quality Engagement

So what does constitute excellence in outreach and engagement? While research and teaching functions of the land grant universities utilize long-established conventions such as graduation rates, extramural research funds, and the production of peer-reviewed articles as indicators of program quality, outreach and engagement have no agreed upon conventions.

But not all public universities share the same commitment to outreach and engagement. Nor do all segments of public universities operationalize outreach and engagement in the same manner. Consequently, any effort to compare (or benchmark) various departments, units, or institutions on the merits of their outreach or engagement activities will, at a minimum, produce a lively debate regarding the appropriateness of the standards, benchmarks, or indicators. In spite of these challenges, several efforts are underway to develop mutually agreed upon standards for benchmarking engagement activities.

In 2002, The Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC), an alliance of Big Ten Universities plus the University of Illinois – Chicago, established a Committee on Engagement to provide “strategic advice to member institutions on issues of engagement. Central to this committee’s work is the development of a common definition of engagement that would spark the generation of scholarship-based indicators that would lead to possible institutional benchmarks.

According to the CIC Committee on Engagement, engagement is “the partnership of university knowledge and resources with those of the public and private sectors to enrich scholarship, research, and creative activity; enhance curriculum, teaching and learning; prepare educated, engaged citizens; strengthen democratic values and civic responsibility; address critical societal issues; and contribute to the public good (CIC, 2005).”

So how can various stakeholders know whether a particular institution and its various subunits are, in fact, engaged? What information can be gathered to serve as evidence of engagement?

Benchmarking Engagement

In the spring on 2003, the CIC Committee on Engagement entered into a partnership with the NASULGC Council on Extension, Continuing Education, and Public Service's (CECEPS) Benchmarking Task Force to generate benchmarks that “all universities can use to assess institutional effectiveness and service to society (CIC, 2005).”

The CIC Committee on Engagement offers the following seven categories of engagement indicators that institutions can use for documenting scholarly engagement. They are:

- Evidence of institutional commitment to engagement
- Evidence of institutional resource commitments to engagement
- Evidence that students are involved in engagement and outreach activities
- Evidence that faculty and staff are engaged with external constituents
- Evidence that institutions are engaged with their communities
- Evidence of assessing the impact and outcomes of engagement
- Evidence of revenue opportunities generated through engagement

The Ohio State University has been selected to pilot the collection of a set of engagement indicators organized around these seven categories. The results of this pilot effort will undoubtedly shape the direction of any future efforts to establish national indicators of engagement.

Just recently, the Cooperative Extension System has made a commitment to be more formally involved in benchmarking engagement. A newly formed working group on Measuring Excellence in Extension was appointed by the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy (ECOP) to work cooperatively with the CIC and CECEPS efforts already underway.

Rankings and Accreditation

It is also interesting to note that the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (2005) has selected thirteen institutions to participate in a pilot project to help develop a new classification system for documenting and benchmarking community engagement. Development of such a classification scheme is part of a broader reconsideration of the long established *Carnegie Classification* to better represent community engagement.

In addition, the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools Higher Learning Commission has revised its accreditation standards by developing new standards for assessing engagement and service. These standards require that:

- the organization learn from the constituencies it serves and analyzes its capacity to serve their needs and expectations.
- the organization has the capacity and commitment to engage with its identified constituencies and communities.
- the organization demonstrates its responsiveness to those constituencies that depend on it for service.
- internal and external constituencies value the services the organization provides.

Cooperative Extension's Role

Clearly, there are a number of efforts already underway to establish benchmarks for outreach and engagement work. However, most of the current efforts to establish such benchmarks focus on work done by an entire institution, not just Cooperative Extension. Work groups charged with the task of identifying benchmarks may not necessarily have significant representation from land grant institutions. For example, of the thirteen institutions involved in the Carnegie project, only two, Michigan State University and the University of Minnesota are land grant institutions with Extension Services. If the Carnegie classification, for example, becomes the standard for benchmarking outreach and engagement, how will land grant institutions fare? Will the work of Cooperative Extension be adequately represented in these metrics?

What can Cooperative Extension do to ensure that its performance is measured by the "right" yardstick? Some would argue that Cooperative Extension needs to establish its own set of performance benchmarks. Chester Fehlis, Director Emeritus at Texas A&M University, (2005) asks "How do we define excellence in Extension to a University president, a chancellor, a dean, a vice president, a faculty member from another college, our state legislatures, Congress, and our constituents? What are the metrics that define excellence in our state and national Extension system?" Our problem is that "every institution has self-defined metrics. There are no mutual metrics that nationally define the best, or even top ten."

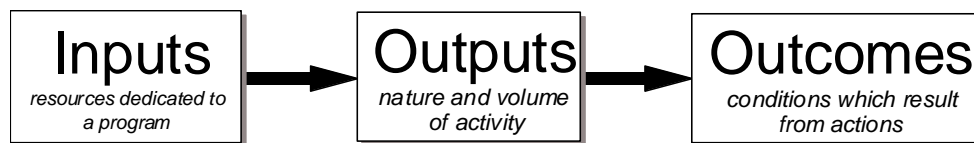
But developing a specific set of Extension metrics may accomplish little if they are not recognized by the broader community of those doing outreach and engagement. Karen Bruns, Leader, OSU Cares at the Ohio State University (2005), suggests that “we need to be blending our work with what the University as a whole is doing. There is much we can all learn from each other. If we are not all talking the same language, how are others across campus going to be able to validate our work? How will we be able to validate theirs? If Extension is to be a leader in university-wide outreach, we need to be thinking rather broadly about what encompasses outreach.”

The Challenge to Extension

Consequently, Cooperative Extension must not focus solely on the development of metrics for comparing one state’s Extension Service with another’s but strategically positioning itself to have influence on the selection of university-wide engagement benchmarks as well. Doing the latter may well lead to greater acceptance of the metrics by which Extension is evaluated. Extension directors must continually monitor the efforts of the CECEPS Benchmarking Task Force, the CIC Committee on Engagement, and the ECOP working group and interact with the members of these groups to shape the nature and scope of the indicators selected. But what type of information should such indicators convey about an organization’s performance?

Types of Indicators

One common way of categorizing indicators is according to the type of information they communicate about an organization’s programs. Input indicators represent the resources dedicated to a particular set of efforts. Output indicators represent the nature and volume of activities and services provided. Outcome indicators are measures of the conditions brought about, at least in part, by the organization’s actions. The relationship between inputs, outputs, and outcomes is depicted in the following illustration.



Inputs allow an organization to provide programs and services. Those programs and services, according to a program’s theory, are seen as producing a set of valued outcomes.

If Cooperative Extension were to speak with one voice regarding the indicators by which Extension Services nationwide would be “benchmarked” what would those indicators be? Would they represent inputs dedicated toward Extension programs such as FTEs and extramural funds garnered to support Extension programming? Should indicators represent outputs such as publications, client contacts, CEUs, number of diagnostic samples processed, and the like? Or should indicators represent outcomes of Cooperative Extension programs such as measures of client learning, behavioral change, or economic impact?

The question is further complicated by the information needs of stakeholders. Some are interested in knowing the characteristics of the clientele served by an organization. Others want to know how successful Cooperative Extension was in securing grants and contracts. Still others want to know if Cooperative Extension’s programs made a difference. Consequently, care must be taken to select indicators that meet the information needs of multiple stakeholders.

Aggregation Issues

Another question which must be answered relates to the ability to aggregate indicators across the various programs of an institution or an organization. For example, it is quite easy to aggregate input indicators such as FTEs and dollars across programs and units. Output indicators such as contacts and publications can also be aggregated fairly easily. But since programs use different strategies or interventions to produce their outcomes, “counting” a particular type of program action such as counseling sessions becomes somewhat problematic. It is still more difficult to aggregate outcome indicators across programs unless they are highly generic in nature, such as the number of people who change behavior as

a result of an organization or agency's efforts. But because they tend to be so "watered down" such generic outcome indicators have little meaning to some stakeholders.

Michigan State University addresses such issues of aggregation in their campus-wide inventory of outreach and engagement. Their inventory collects numerical data regarding inputs and outputs, but voluntarily allows faculty and staff to enter narrative information about outcomes. Such narrative statements about program outcomes allow for the specificity needed to make the data provided to stakeholders have meaning. This scheme is being used by at least several other land grant institutions currently involved in developing indicators of outreach, engagement, Cooperative Extension, or public service.

The University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) has also been collecting data on a limited number of Cooperative Extension indicators upon which they can "benchmark" themselves with nine other state Extension Services. Indicators include such things as client contacts, number of volunteers, amount of county-generated funding, and the number of commercial pesticide applicators receiving certification.

Validity and Reliability Issues

For indicator data to have value to stakeholders it must be considered valid and reliable. Specifically, validity refers to the issue of whether or not a particular indicator is measuring what it is intended to measure. Reliability, however, refers to an indicator's ability to produce consistent data over time or across multiple sites. Reliability and validity are inextricably intertwined.

One validity issue is related to the selection of indicators. For example, the number of people who participate in a program may be a valid measure of program reach, but may not be a valid measure of program quality. Consequently it is important to carefully consider the indicator or indicators that will be used to measure a particular dimension of performance. But another validity question may arise from our selection of the method by which we measure a particular indicator. For example, certain self-report scales may either overestimate or underestimate how frequently program participants perform a particular practice or behavior. Consequently, the data produced by a particular scale may not be valid.

Reliability concerns arise when there are questions about whether data are being collected in a consistent manner across all institutions. For example, if the amount of external financial support for outreach work is found to be a valid indicator of organizational performance, what counts? Do only competitive grants count? Should Cooperative Extension count funds for which only state Extension Services may apply? What about gifts? Contracts? User fees? Agreement must be reached on what will be counted.

A similar problem exists with indicators such as contacts. Does a contact in Kentucky mean the same thing as a contact in Texas? If one state counts electronic contacts such as "hits" on a web site and another does not, a reliability issue arises. In this case, lack of reliability also leads to questions about validity of the data collected.

Clearly, common definitions must be developed for all indicators along with common protocols for measurement.

Use of Indicator Data

Problems with validity and reliability can, in their own right, affect the conclusions one might draw about a particular institution or its subunits. But in addition to utilization issues stemming from validity and reliability, several other concerns related to use need to be considered.

The old adage, "what gets measured gets done" may issue an important warning regarding the use of indicators. Faculty and staff may tend to develop programs that produce the indicators being measured. Such a practice may both decrease the breadth of Extension programming and produce a decrease in creativity and innovation.

It is also important to consider that by specifying and proclaiming the indicators by which Extension wants to see itself measured there is an inherent risk. Extension must then produce. But most agree it is preferable for Extension to identify its own set of performance indicators than to wait for performance indicators to be imposed on Extension by outside forces.

Toward Consensus

A logical place to begin building consensus on indicators was to conduct an inventory of the type of indicator data currently being collected by the thirteen states in the Southern Region. A table depicting the results of this inventory can be found at the end of this document.

But what criteria should be used in the selection of common indicators which can be used either internally as Extension-specific benchmarks or to influence the selection of university-wide indicators of engagement or outreach? The authors offer the following set of questions to guide selection of such indicators:

- Is the indicator already being collected by a number of states?
- Would the addition of the indicator add a significant reporting burden to the states?
- Can the indicator be defined in a manner that data can be collected consistently across departments or institutions?
- Do accepted protocols, methods and conventions exist for measuring the indicator?
- Can assurances be provided that will guard against the misuse of the data?
- Does the indicator fairly represent the nature or magnitude of Cooperative Extension work?
- Does the indicator fall within one of the CIC's seven categories of engagement indicators?

Sample Indicators

Using the above criteria, the authors have identified the following as examples of the type of indicators which might be used to measure Cooperative Extension's performance. The list should be viewed as a set of examples, not a list of recommendations.

- Number of youth participating in resident and day camps
- Amount of extramural support for Cooperative Extension work
- Number of diagnostic samples processed
- Number of community-based collaborations with which Cooperative Extension is engaged
- Customer satisfaction with Cooperative Extension
- Educational contact hours (or CEUs)
- One-on-one consultations

Such a list may be expanded and refined using the guidelines previously mentioned.

Recommendations

Almost without exception, public universities across the country are examining ways to assess the performance of their outreach and engagement activities. Simultaneously, Cooperative Extension is initiating discussions about performance indicators by which state Extension services might be benchmarked or compared.

A fundamental question facing Extension administrators is whether the Cooperative Extension System should establish and collect data for a finite set of Extension-specific performance indicators or work to influence the identification of broader indicators of university outreach and engagement so that they fairly represent the work of Cooperative Extension System.

The authors believe that it would be a serious mistake for Cooperative Extension to ignore the efforts of CIC, CECEPS, ECOP, the Carnegie Foundation, and other accrediting bodies. Cooperative Extension must not work in isolation but, rather, work in a strategic fashion to influence the selection of broader university-wide indicators of quality outreach and engagement.

However, to effectively influence such efforts, Cooperative Extension must speak with one voice regarding the indicators it deems as appropriate for measuring its performance. Such efforts must be broader than regional in nature.

Consequently, the authors of this paper submit the following recommendations for consideration by the Southern Region Extension Directors.

- The authors recommend that ASRED and AEA collaborate with Extension directors from the other Extension regions to support the work of the ECOP working group on Measuring Excellence in Extension.

- Southern Region representatives to the ECOP working group on Measuring Excellence in Extension should be instructed to use Southern Region Indicator Work Group that prepared this white paper as an advisory group and sounding board regarding the input provided to the national effort.
- The authors also recommend that the Southern Region Extension Directors charge the Southern Region Indicator Work Group to develop a list of performance indicators for use in the Southern Region using the criteria set forth in this white paper as a guide.

List of References

- Bruns, K. (2005) e-mail correspondence with author. The Ohio State University.
- Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (2005). *Carnegie Selects Institutions to Help Develop New Community Engagement Classifications*. Press Release. Available at www.carnegiefoundation.org/newsroom/press_releases/05.01.2.htm
- Committee on Institutional Cooperation (2005). *Resource Guide and Recommendations for Defining and Benchmarking Engagement*. Champaign, IL: CIC Committee on Engagement.
- Extension Committee on Organization and Policy (2002) *The Extension System: A Vision for the 21st Century*. Washington, DC: National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges.
- Fehlis, C.P. (2005). *A Call for Visionary Leadership*. Journal of Extension. Available at www.joe.org/joe/2005february/comm1.shtml
- Hatry, H.P. (1999) *Performance Measurement: Getting Results*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute Press.
- Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land Grant Universities (1999). *Returning to Our Roots: The Engaged Institution*. Washington, DC: National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges.
- Ladewig, H. (2003). *Accountability of the Public Service Function of Land Grant Colleges of Agriculture*. Paper Presented at the 66th Annual Meeting of the Rural Sociological Society. Montreal.
- Michigan State University (2005). *Outreach and Engagement Measurement Instrument*. Available at <https://oemi.msu.edu>

	AL	AR	FL	GA	KY	LA	MS	NC	OK	PR	SC	TN	TX	VA	1890
INPUTS								X				X			
<i>External Funding</i>				X	X						X				
<i>% Time/Educ Programs</i>	X	X								X	X			X	
OUTPUTS															
<i># Group Meetings</i>		X		X		X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X
<i>Group Educ Contacts</i>		X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
<i>Contact Hours</i>	X	X		X		X		X			X	X	X		
<i>Educ Contacts/Faculty</i>		X	X	X		X				X	X	X			
<i># in CE Programs</i>		X		X	X			X			X				X
<i>CE Contact Hours</i>		X		X	X			X			X				
<i>Certifications</i>		X	X	X				X		X					
<i>Individual Contacts</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
<i>TAL Contacts</i>				X									X		X
<i>Partnerships</i>		X		X						X	X	X			X
<i>Extension Homemaker Members</i>					X						X				
<i>4H Enrollment</i>	X	X		X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X		X
<i>Minority Involvement</i>	X	X		X	X	X		X			X	X			
<i>Lab Samples Processed</i>		X		X						X	X	X			
<i>Media Efforts</i>		X		X			X	X		X	X	X			
<i>Publications</i>		X		X			X			X	X			X	
<i># Volunteers</i>		X	X	X		X		X		X	X	X	X	X	X
<i>Volunteer Time</i>		X	X	X				X		X	X	X		X	
<i>Volunteer Contacts</i>		X		X			X	X			X		X		
<i>Collaborative Programs/Projects</i>															X
<i>Farm Cooperatives Organized</i>															X
<i>Partnerships Developed/Created</i>															X
<i>Small and Family Farms Served</i>															X
OUTCOMES/IMPACTS															
<i>Increase in Knowledge</i>		X	X		X	4H		X		X	X	X	X	X	X
<i>Increase in Skills</i>		X	X		X			X		X	X	X	X	X	X
<i>Change in Attitude</i>		X	X		X			X			X	X	X		X
<i>Plan to Adopt Practices</i>		X	X		X						X	X	X*		X
<i>Plan to Adopt New Technologies</i>		X									X		X*		
<i>Plan to Change Behavior</i>		X	X								X	X	X*		
<i>Adoption of Practices</i>		X	X		X	AG		X		X	X	X	X	X	
<i>Adoption of New Technologies</i>		X	X		X			X		X	X	X	X		
<i>Change of Behavior</i>		X	X		X			X		X	X	X	X	X	X
<i>Economic Impact</i>		X	X	X	X			X			X	X	X		X
<i>Social Impact</i>		X	X	X	X							X	X		X
<i>9th grade enrollment to graduation</i>				X											
<i>Businesses Created/Expanded</i>															X
<i>Increases in Sales</i>															X
EFFICIENCY MEASURES															
<i>Number of Participants/State Dollars</i>		X		X							X	X			
<i>Cost Per Educational Contact</i>		X										X	X		

X* Denotes these variables are collected in aggregate