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Accountability is described in one dictionary as "explainable" and "responsible" (Geralnik, 1976). In a more specific context relating to organizational accountability, Richardson and Knecht (1996) see accountability as "appropriate responsiveness to funding entities and others for assuring that the mission of the organization is sufficiently implemented in order to achieve intended outcomes" (p.1).

Organizational accountability, as required by Federal law, has been the norm for the United States Cooperative Extension System since its inception in 1914. While annual program reports have been submitted by states and territories to the Federal government since that time, Rasmussen (1989) emphasizes that these reports have not been as critical for continuing public funding as they are in today's society. On a global context, Rivera (1996) indicates that in the future, the very dynamics of society and public policy are likely to require even greater accountability of extension organizations in order for them to survive or thrive.

Program relevance as judged by value to constituents and society is now the public norm for questioning the value of both public and private organizations. Shearon (1999) states that "this era of high accountability for publicly funded government programs is demanding more results and impact data to show societal relevance" (p. 1, Session M). In judging public benefit, "people impacts" are key factors in program accomplishments.

The people impacts may be indicated as financial gains, taxpayer savings, efficiencies gained, environmental enhancements or protection, individual life enhancements, resources preserved, or societal improvements (Bennett,1996). Regardless of the ultimate level of impact, increasingly program accountability must focus on assuring that targeted audiences are informed of "people impacts" plus other program successes as desired by a specific audience (Gale,1994; Sherman,1995).

Communicating Success

The dictionary defines success as " . . . favorable termination of a venture . . . the degree or measure of attaining a desired end . . . an undertaking that succeeds or confers success . . . succeeding fully or in accordance with one's desires" (Babcock, 1993). Interviews with numerous extension professionals indicate that success is seen in many forms. One of those interviewed essentially summarized the sentiments of all when he stated that program success is "choosing

to do the right things well, and achieving measurable results from doing our programs that meet the needs of people" (Richardson, 1995, p. 1). The key, however, is that in conveying program successes to the respective audiences for accountability purposes, it is important that the message communicate actions taken by clients or impacts on clients as a result of the program (Boyle, 1997). Such assertions can provide the real impact information that is now required to show the societal relevance of such programs. Often, success stories in the Cooperative Extension accountability nomenclature may also be called impact statements or silver bullets as well.

Success Stories for Accountability

The Cooperative Extension System has a large number of audiences that expect, and some require by directive or law, accountability information (NCCESTMTF, 1998). Some of these audiences include United States Congressional Representatives, county commissioners, state legislators, county managers, Congressional and state legislative staff, clientele, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the university systems, extension advisory groups and many other groups and individuals as well. While the audiences may be different, the key is to develop a plan for accountability and implement it to focus on each of the respective audiences who are identified in the plan. Based on evidence gained from many of the identified audiences in the North Carolina plan, concise success stories that indicate practice adoption or changed behaviors by clients or positive impacts on clients have generally been found to be highly popular for communicating program impacts, especially to extension clientele, state legislators, county commissioners, advisory groups and legislative aides.

Both from voluntary comments received from these recipients as well as from requested feedback, considerable anecdotal input has been received that clearly indicates the value of concise success stories for providing program impact information to those audiences. Many have indicated that brief, concise statements focused directly to the core of a program and its results are highly preferred over more lengthy, explanatory documents. Therefore, based on this evidence, success stories are used by the North Carolina Cooperative Extension System (NCCES) for productive program accountability purposes that provide conciseness which reaches the heart of the program outcome and impact. The following is a sampling of comments made by internal and external audiences regarding their

attitudes and preferences about success stories as well as message brevity:

> My professional style is to get to the point as succinctly as possible, because staffers are busy. Congressional committees usually limit testimony (either or both in pages and time) to encourage brevity. Formatting also helps, so that your main points stand out (Legislative Affairs Expert, National Association of Counties).

> We want brief, concise reports of accomplishments that cover the main points of: Who's involved, Problem, What you did, Difference it made, Any collaborators, Contact person, and 'On one page' (Congressional Aide for Congresswoman Eva Clayton).

> I want information that is really concise, tells me what is happening without wasting words, and that I can read very quickly (Member of N. C. House of Representatives).

> My Extension Advisory Council members expressed a preference for brief success stories, by indicating their pleasure with a marketing piece that we used for program reporting that included success stories only. They specifically requested that I provide this type of document to them periodically (NCCES County Extension Director).

The success stories and narratives are easily accessible and can be incorporated into talks to emphasize local programs and impacts. Local audiences want to know and hear about how Cooperative Extension Service(CES) makes a difference to their communities and for their neighbors. Impacts even a county away are no longer adequate to build or maintain local support (Director, County Operations, NCCES).

Developing Success Stories

Considering the uses described for concise stories that are brief, descriptive and explanatory, in providing program impact information, some general guidelines for developing such stories may be useful. As McArdle (1991) indicates, the key is to limit the story to only the main point, which is to convey the program impact or success. Also, when developing a success story, the principles of conciseness and brevity as espoused by Calvert (1993) hold especially true. A success story should include a very brief description of the problem, the educational program response, the participants, other partners (if applicable), and program impact or participant response, plus a conclusion (Boyle, 1997; Richardson & Corbin, 1996). Thus, the structure consists of Problem, Program, People, Partners, Impact, and Conclusion and can be stated as the four P's, I and C or PPPPIC. If available, the participant response may be stated as a testimonial.

While brevity is a commonly used word to describe a success story, this is a relative term. Yet, based on inputs and testimonials received, the emphasis was on limiting the length to one page or less in communicating program success via print. Therefore, for purposes of communicating successes of an organization (in one page or less), hard decisions have to be made as to whether to convey only one story or several stories.

Because knowledge of program results is the ultimate goal of most accountability efforts, NCCES has focused on providing as many success stories as possible in such confined parameters. Therefore, while a single page may allow 400 words or more, if several stories are preferred, then 150 words per story allows for about three success stories on a single printed page. With this in mind, during the conceptual stages and design of NCCES's Web-based Extension Reporting System, an initial decision was made to allow only 100 words per success story. Anything over 100 words would automatically be truncated by the computer. However, even in the testing stage prior to release of the system, it was recognized that in order to effectively include the desired PPPPIC parameters, all available space was often utilized, and many stories had a few words or sentences truncated.

With this 100-word-limit problem clearly identified, it was decided that up to 150 words would be allowed before truncation occurred. This additional space has been sufficient to allow all of the key parameters to be covered in success stories produced by field faculty and specialists. The World Wide Web was only beginning to be used extensively during 1995 when NCCES developed its Web-based accomplishment reporting system in order to meet the known accountability requirements facing Extension at that time as well as to meet anticipated needs for the future. The development and release of the system coincided with the establishment of an Extension Statewide Graphic User Interface (GUI) computer network that resulted in the word "truncated" being observed for the first time by many. However, humorous feedback quickly occurred regarding the effectiveness of the truncation feature on the success story menu of the system. Usually, such humor was made in statements by field faculty who said, "I had never heard of truncated until now, but after seeing that computer clip off part of my nice success story, I learned very quickly that when it said it would be truncated at 150 words, it meant it!" Thus, the computer system in which NCCES success stories are entered effectively assures brevity. The system allows for the reporting of teaching contacts, planned program accomplishments, civil rights reports, special program activity reporting, grants, as well as for success stories. However, the success stories have proven to be most useful for printing on handouts, fact sheets, or other flyers in order to communicate specific results to intended audiences, whether from a county level, Congressional districts, or statewide.

The success stories collected via the reporting system are posted on the NCCES Web site for public access. More than 1,700 stories of program success were posted for 1998 alone. Other, more comprehensive, program accomplishment reports that are developed from the data collection system are also posted on the public NCCES Web site.

Key Components of a Success Story

The six key components of a success story have been described earlier in this paper as the problem, program, people, partners, impact, and conclusion, or the PPPPI&C. Obviously, in successes where no partners exist, this component can be readily skipped. Such logic also can apply regarding a concluding statement when insufficient space is available, or the statement of program and impact

clearly communicates the story without further elaboration (Richard-
son & Corbin, 1998).

While the partners and concluding statement may be omitted as
appropriate, analysis of the vast number of success stories entered
into the reporting system has helped to identify some key factors
regarding content of success stories. These analyses by educational
programs specialists, communications specialists and administra-
tors have been especially useful in developing training materials
and programs, as well as examples to help guide the success story
development by field faculty primarily. The NCCES experience in
using success stories for accountability purposes has shown that in
order to communicate an understandable program and its impact,
it is necessary always to include a statement of the problem, the
Cooperative Extension program, the people it serves and its actual
impact. Without these components, one is unable to discern why
the program was presented, what organization is reporting the suc-
cess, who the program served, or what difference it made. Based on
observation of success stories produced by faculty over the past four
years, it is recognized that program success should generally focus
on the entire educational program that includes multiple program
delivery strategies rather than on a single program delivery activi-
ty. Success should be demonstrated by actual outcomes, meaning
actions taken, rather than intended outcomes. That the information
was actually used to make a positive difference should be indicated.
From North Carolina Cooperative Extension's point of view, happi-
ness about an activity or statements of intentions are not sufficient
to indicate a program success story (Richardson & Corbin,1998).

Success Story Analysis

In the following example, an actual success story that was re-
ported in the NCCES reporting system has been analyzed to identify
the six key components.

Heart Healthy Program Successful

Heart disease is the number 1 killer in Robeson County **[Prob-
lem]**. Cooperative Extension in cooperation with local hospital and
Health Dept. **[Partners]** sponsors quarterly "heart healthy" cooking
workshops for the general public. Emphasis is on health recipes and
cooking techniques participants can use in their daily lives **[Pro-
gram]**. Forty-nine consumers participated in the three workshops

[People]. Participants were surveyed several weeks following classes, and 36 indicated they had used class recipes or modified their own recipes to reduce fat, sodium, or sugar. According to the JADA (1996), nutrition intervention saves on average $8000 per patient. Thus, for the small group surveyed there was a potential savings of $288,000 **[Impact]**. Due to interest of participants, workshops will continue quarterly **[Conclusion]**.

Other Success Story Examples

The following examples are real success stories entered into the NCCES reporting system and used in recent accomplishment reports (NCCES, 1998). Each of these success stories effectively communicates positive program impacts.

Reduced Cotton Tillage Program Produces Savings

Problems with wind and sand injury on cotton in the spring has resulted in Cooperative Extension focusing educational programs on reduced tillage farming methods. Acres of reduced tillage in Bertie County has increased from 500 to 20,000 in 1997. Most farmers are strip tilling, using hooded sprayers and never cultivating the cotton. Educational programs and farm visits have assisted farmers in equipment selection adjustments, along with herbicide selection and rates. Results have been the use of less herbicides, reduced tillage trips, savings on land preparation time in the spring, reduced cultivations, better weed control, increase in organic matter and better stands with no wind damage. All these have resulted in a $487,500 savings to the county's farmers.

4-H Career Program Makes a Difference

Many high school students do not have the opportunity to see first hand what is involved in a career of their choice. Wayne County 4-H collaborated with a civic club to conduct a shadowing program in which high school students experienced a day with an adult in a

career of their choice. The day ended with a luncheon to honor the students and recognize the adult volunteers. Each student had to write an essay about his/her experience and included remarks such as: "This day has helped me decide what I want to go to college for." Another student commented, "Through the 4-H career program I learned that what I thought I wanted as a career was not really for me. This program helped me see this before I invested my time in college preparing for a career."

Pesticide Container Recycling Program Saves Landfill Space

Used pesticide containers can be a major environmental hazard. In order to assure that farmers and others properly dispose of such containers, the Caldwell County Extension Center is in its second year of conducting a pesticide container recycling program. This year, two educational programs were held to educate producers on the proper methods of recycling containers. Of the 128 that attended, 120 stated they will or are taking part in the program. So far this year, the program has resulted in the recycling of 700, two-and-one-half-gallon containers; 100, five-gallon containers; and 6, fifty-five-gallon drums. This has saved the county approximately 1150 square feet of landfill space. At $17.50/sq foot, the resulting savings is more than $20,000.00 for landfill space alone.

Sawmill Efficiency Program Increases Income

There is a great need to increase the competitiveness and profitability of North Carolina's forest products industry. Extension programs that focused on educational and technical assistance to North Carolina forest products manufacturers resulted in one sawmill operation making modifications to its dispatch system. The results reported by this

one mill indicated a production gain of 10,000 board feet of lumber per day or increased income of $300,000 per year. While the entire wood products industry is served by Wood Products Extension, this one example is indicative of the many impacts accruing as a result of useful educational opportunities being provided in a timely and inclusive manner.

Value of Training

While conceptual designs and computer systems can be developed by administrators and computer systems designers, the actual writing of quality success stories is in the hands of field and campus faculty who actually conduct the programs about which they are reporting. Even though specific parameters can be developed, such as the PPPPIC and the wording limits, what really constitutes a quality success story and how to present it in a positive mode becomes most important. Since the primary purpose for such stories is to convey real world successes and effectiveness of the organization's educational programs, it is important to think about the message that is being conveyed by the success story. Only training and coaching of field and campus faculty have been found by this author to be effective in helping most faculty gain the knowledge and skills needed for writing quality success stories.

Through the continuous reviews of information entered into the NCCES reporting system, both number and quality of success stories have continuously improved over the past four years. At the present time, about 1,800 success stories are entered into the system each year, and more than seventy-five per cent present their successes in the prescribed format that identifies program impact. However, some are still entered that only describe how hard the agent is working, and a few are simply so poorly written that no use can be made of them for any purpose, except to use as examples of what does not constitute a quality success story. Fortunately, such comparisons of excellence versus mediocrity have been most effective in helping faculty to understand the difference.

As the vast number of stories are reviewed for specific accountability uses, it has been discovered that the inadequate or inappropriate statement of the problem can give the reader mistaken impressions as to why the program was undertaken or what prompted the

initiative. Thus, in order to communicate program need, a concise statement of the problem is needed. In stating a problem, it is easy to convey the impression that the faculty member was sitting at the Extension office waiting for a problem to arise rather than conveying the image that programs were being offered to educate clients to prevent problems and to produce positive program results. Conveyance of the message that the Cooperative Extension System is making a difference in people's lives in a positive manner with demonstrated impacts should be the intended purpose of writing a success story. In North Carolina, we have found that training and more training coupled with practice and feedback are most helpful in faculty's understanding and practice of the right way to write success stories and to convey the correct message in the process. A before-and-after example of the value of agent training in a direct workshop setting analyzing agents' own stories is shown in the following two success stories. Both were reported by the same agent in North Carolina's Extension Reporting System during the past year.

Before Participating in Training

1998
Local System: county X
Person Reporting: livestock agent

> A cattle producer who had done a good job breeding for replacement heifers and selecting brood cows for genetic merit, was not pleased with the price his feeder calves were bringing. He purchased a bull he believed would improve his sale calves. Needing assistance evaluating whether the bull would be suitable for breeding his heifers and mature cows or just mature cows, he sought the opinion of his county agent. Upon studying the genetic makeup of the bull and the producers' existing cow herd, purchase of a new bull was recommended. Conformation, expected progeny differences and breed of the bull as well as current feeder steer market conditions made this bull unsuitable for producing optimum quality and type calves for NC markets. Analyzing market history, the calves from this new bull will net the producer $1875 per year more than the calves from the old bull.

After Participating in Training

1999
Local System: county X
Person Reporting: livestock agent

> A small beef producer marketing his calves as 300-400 pound feeders was not getting the full potential from his herd of good quality brood cows. Through Extension educational efforts, this producer was convinced of the benefits of cross-breeding and using performance-tested bulls that would produce heavier, high market-value calves. He sold his old bull and bought a new bull from a state performance-testing station. Calculating genetic improvement and the value of heterosis, calves resulting from this careful cross-breeding program will weigh 15-20 percent more than previous years' calves and show an increase of $.15/pound in market value. Knowledge gained and practices adopted through Extension educational efforts will increase this farmer's proceeds from the sale of calves by $1150 in one year's time.

Difference

The second story, which was reported several months following training, indicates that the agent gained an understanding of writing success stories, both from communicating the program impact point of view and in knowing how to place Extension in a positive, proactive role as well. Therefore, as a result of such training and communication from NCCES administration as to how the information is being actually used for accountability efforts, the quality and quantity of reports entered in the reporting system has continued to improve very rapidly.

Conclusion

Often called "silver bullets" and "impact statements" within the Cooperative Extension System, success stories have considerable utility in meeting accountability demands. These demands for

program results and impacts emanate from multiple internal and external entities. Usually, those demands are for highly specific and concise information on program impacts and accomplishments. The concise success story format provides much of the framework to meet these diverse accountability demands. Altogether, NCCES has identified more than thirty separate entities who require or expect accountability information. While county commissioners, state legislators and university administrators as well as the Federal government may required extensive accountability inputs, others such as long-time clientele may only require minimal information in order to continue their support of Extension. Thus, while some audiences may be considered a higher priority or require greater attention than others, all can be construed as essential elements in the support of NCCES (NCCESTMTF, 1998). Use of the concise and impact-laden success stories has been shown to have great utility in meeting many of those audiences' accountability needs and requirements.

In this time of performance-based budgeting and reallocation or reduction of funds, questions are being asked by policy makers and the public about program duplication or relevance. In such an atmosphere, while success stories have been shown to meet many organizational accountability needs, a multiplicity of other accountability needs may exist. For example, the Federal Office of Management and Budget requires only numbers of teaching contacts by Extension. Recently, the University of North Carolina System began requiring reports on the number of non-degree credit activities Extension conducts and descriptions of the primary type of delivery method involved. Grant reports are strictly dictated by the granting entity. They may require program outcomes or simply require an accounting of how the money was spent. Such examples indicate that success stories are not the sole answer to all accountability needs of an organization. Yet, based on the experience of NCCES during the past four years in using program success stories, this means of accountability is highly adaptable for a wide array of audiences who use or require accountability information from Extension.

Indeed, by having a reporting system that has a defined database specifically to collect and store success stories for use at any time greatly enhances the capacity of the organization to provide audiences the accountability information they require. Also many recipients are impressed with the speed in which requested information can be delivered. Such speed and dependability for quality program impact information can produce very positive responses

from those who need such information. Thus, while staff training needs continue for both development and use of program success stories, most Extension personnel are committed to take the necessary time and efforts to accomplish the task. Primarily, they are recognizing the value of their stories for local accountability and marketing efforts, plus the positive public responses they are receiving in their own counties and other locations. Program information that is readily available as needed for program accountability or for organizational marketing is being shown to be a strong and highly valuable component of NCCES' accountability system. Perhaps the three most important factors in an accountability system is to have a reporting system that provides a readily available supply of program impact information that can be used for planned accountability purposes as well as for the many unanticipated requests that frequently arise; have adequately trained and committed people who conduct effective programs and report the impact information; and effectively communicate the desired accountability information tailored to the respective audiences. In this vein, the key to effective organizational accountability is to provide the right accountability information to the right people at the right time in the right format (NCCESTMTF, 1998).

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