Process Evaluation

Many grant proposals call for a "process evaluation." What is it and what kind of information do I need to collect?

Discussion of program evaluation in Extension tends to focus on "impact evaluation," the systematic collection of data about client outcomes such as changes in attitude or in the adoption of recommended management practices. These program outcomes are surely important to funders, but there is another type of information that is also crucial to them: from process evaluation. It is the collection of data that describe, measure, and monitor implementation processes through which your program achieved its outcomes even when things did not go as planned.

Funders need to know this information for two reasons:
- to understand what leads to the outcomes of your program
- to make specific recommendations to other groups about designing future programs

Of particular interest to funders are these program features:
- the extent to which the program reaches the target population
- the program "dose" (often measured by the frequency of delivery of the program, the amount of subject matter, and the depth of participation in program activities)
- the organizational or situational context for the program
- the resources that were required to achieve that "dose"

For a process evaluation, appropriate evidence can validate what you did regarding:

Content	Communication methods
Facilities	Programming procedures
Marketing	Division of responsibilities
Activities	Participation by the target audience(s)
Delivery methods	Staffing arrangements and assignments
Adequacy of training	Participation by volunteers or paraprofessionals
Distribution of resources	Receptivity of the program by the target audience

You can keep accurate, up-to-date records and program materials such as meeting minutes, handouts, newsletters, and bank transactions to provide appropriate information for a process evaluation. You will also want other types of evidence to validate what you did and will want to systematically take pictures, collect newspaper accounts, survey participants, or arrange for videotaping.

An in-depth resource to use when planning a "process evaluation" is this and later editions of:
Morris, L.L. & Fitz-Gibbon, G.T. (1978), *How to measure program implementation.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

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