



Questions for Evaluating a Conference

What is a simple, efficient way to discover what aspects of a conference are not successful and need modification?

Trying to get conferees to provide thoughtful evaluation is an enormous challenge because most conferees are involved in the conference agenda or with friends, and toward the end of the conference, have one foot out the door. Whether you evaluate with end-of-conference focus groups, post conference phone interview or fall back on a survey, you can greatly increase the value of your data with a well crafted question, no matter which method you use.

Focus that question precisely on your evaluation objective: for instance, to discover the aspects of the conference that are not perceived as successful. To craft the question, think of the precise decision you want to make as a result of the data and integrate it into the question. Here is an example for the evaluation objective above:

If you could CHANGE ONE THING, what would you ask us to do differently at next year's conference?

ONE THING I WOULD CHANGE

You can substantially increase the usefulness of the data (and the decision based on it!) if you focus on a special part of the conference:

If you could CHANGE ONE THING about the sessions on leadership, what would you ask us to do differently at next year's conference?

ONE THING I WOULD CHANGE

Experience demonstrates that this question has another benefit. Conferees who answer it tend to offer suggestions on how to do it differently, thus identifying not only what is not succeeding, but also supplying ideas on how to modify it.

The question has the obvious limitations of qualitative data. Since everyone who responded to the survey did not have the opportunity to evaluate each problem or solution, you don't know how prevalent the reported opinions are.

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The reference citation for this Tipsheet is: Kiernan, Nancy Ellen (2001). Questions for Evaluating a Conference: Tipsheet #39, University Park, PA: Penn State Cooperative Extension.

Available: <http://www.extension.psu.edu/evaluation/pdf/TS39.pdf>

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