**Partying with a Purpose:**

**How Data Parties Can Promote Participation in and a Culture of Evaluation in Extension**

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Program evaluation has become increasingly important in Extension, not only for purposes of accountability, but also as a means of measuring program outcomes and amplifying community impact. There is also an ongoing need to increase organizational evaluation capacity as well as create and sustain a culture of evaluation within Extension systems. Without a healthy culture of evaluation, Extension programs and systems will struggle to achieve their full potential, communicate their value, sustain their funding, and demonstrate their worthiness of new funding opportunities. Thus, it is crucial that Extension systems focus on building both evaluation capacity and an organizational culture of evaluation. Stakeholder engagement in the evaluation process is a powerful way to build a culture of evaluation. Franz (2013) has written about data parties as a tool for including stakeholders in the evaluation process, particularly in the analysis phase.

In January 2020, Oklahoma State University (OSU) Extension held their Biennial Conference for all Extension professionals from county educators to state office personnel. Notably, all of these branches were in different developmental stages of evaluation capacity building. In an attempt to begin building a collective culture of evaluation across OSU Extension, the team of evaluation specialists worked with the conference committee to include various evaluation methods throughout the Biennial Conference in addition to traditional post-workshop evaluation surveys. The purpose of this project was to model for Extension professionals different types of program evaluation methods, including participatory data collection and analysis, to demonstrate that not all meaningful evaluation has to follow a traditional survey format. This study protocol was reviewed and processed as exempt by the Oklahoma State University.

During the Extension conference, Dr. Cook co-led a session focusing on the findings from community forums held across the state of Oklahoma, where she introduced the topic of data parties to OSU Extension professionals in attendance as the next stage of the community forum process. Dr. Cook presented topics that were collaboratively identified (via community forums held across the state) as important focus areas for Extension to address in the coming years. To model data party methodology, attendees recorded their reactions to the presented data on insight sheets, which were then collected to inclusion in the overall community forum data analysis. Dr. Cook facilitated a group discussion on the findings and reactions to the findings to engage in collective meaning-making of the community forum data.

The final day of the conference featured a Gallery Walk, which provided attendees with a variety of experiences using participatory data collection and analysis methods. The Gallery Walk allowed for attendees to react to data that emerged from our community forums, as well as to see various data collection and analysis activities in action. Stations such as a feedback wall, a photo booth, a Thrive Tree, and a Meaning Map, were set up around the ballroom for attendees to browse and participate in at their choosing. To conclude the Gallery Walk and the Biennial Conference, the winners of our Success Story Contest that ended just before the conference shared their success story presentations. The purpose of the Success Story Contest was two-fold: 1) To celebrate the success of Extension programming and 2) To further build excitement around and a culture of evaluation. Often, program evaluation is associated with rigid, data-driven surveys, but success stories are an impactful way to show program value and relevance.

Visualizing collected data (to create data décor) and developing various interactive and reflective activities allows for participatory data analysis that is inviting and engaging. In addition to recruiting diverse stakeholders to attend the party, you should also recruit one or more facilitators, notetakers, and someone to document artifacts via photographs. Ideally, facilitators should be available at activity stations to guide participants, answer any questions, and address problems with technology or materials. Notetakers are particularly important for documenting insights that emerge from discussion. Try to create a positive, upbeat environment to encourage engagement and thoughtful participation in the data party activities. Consult with your Institutional Review Board (IRB) about human subjects research determination.

When throwing a data party, whether in-person or online via a videoconferencing program, there are a number of considerations to make to party *responsively*. Every effort should be made to engage a representative group of community members. Over-invite those who are typically underrepresented/under-included/minoritized. Interrogate your assumptions about the reasons for “lack of engagement.” Rather than assuming that some groups are “not interested,” recognize and try to address sociohistorical barriers to participation, as well as equity issues. Work to not perpetuate *-isms ­*(racism, classism, ageism, etc.). Be mindful of contextual, organizational, and cultural responsiveness when deciding on format, location, stations/activities, facilitators. Acknowledge the Indigenous land your land-grant/grab institution occupies. Center community member and educator voices, not specialist or “expert” voices. Be intentional about anticipating accessibility issues, including physical, technological, and literacy-based. Be open to new ways of knowing and doing. Well-planned data parties with intentional facilitation and a representative group of attendees can advance Extension’s efforts to increase participation in evaluation, build evaluation capacity, and foster an organizational culture of evaluation.