



Evaluating an event: when and how

Extension programs typically comprise a series of events coupled with fact sheets, newspaper columns, radio shows and/or newsletters, all geared to the same target audience. A comprehensive evaluation should attempt to measure the impact of the combined delivery methods across the target audience.

Once in awhile however, one event within a program will stand out, perhaps because of the large number of people it draws, the value of the subject matter to the target audience, or the amount of concentrated time on the subject matter. For such events, Extension educators often want a measure of the impact, even though the expected impact may be limited.

Evaluation Strategy

One characteristic of the event, the large crowd, will make evaluation a challenge. Here is the main tip: create a limited but forceful evaluation that measures only the most important objectives. For instance, develop

- a couple of realistic impact questions on knowledge and intentions
- a question about the impact of the instructor on his or her capacity to motivate the participants to change
- a question about the value of the delivery method, in order to plan a similar event.

Impact Question - Knowledge

Be sure the impact questions are specific and related to a discrete educational objective for the event. For a knowledge question at a symposium on perennials, you might be tempted to ask

My understanding of perennials **BEFORE** the symposium was: (circle number)

- 1 **NON-EXISTENT**
- 2 **MINIMAL**
- 3 **MODERATE**
- 4 **CONSIDERABLE**

My understanding of perennials **now**, AFTER the symposium is: (circle number)

- 1 **NON-EXISTENT**
- 2 **MINIMAL**
- 3 **MODERATE**
- 4 **CONSIDERABLE**

However, the latter questions are very general and can be interpreted in too many ways to make it valid! They are not specific enough. A more specific question will yield more valid data. For example,

My understanding of how to incorporate a reliable perennial garden in my landscape **BEFORE** the symposium was: (circle number)

- 1 **NON-EXISTENT**
- 2 **MINIMAL**
- 3 **MODERATE**
- 4 **CONSIDERABLE**



My understanding of how to incorporate a reliable perennial garden in my landscape **now**, AFTER the symposium is: (circle number)

- 1 NON-EXISTENT
- 2 MINIMAL
- 3 MODERATE
- 4 CONSIDERABLE

Other examples can be found in [TIPSHEET #24](#).

Impact Question - Intentions

You want to include two elements in an intention question to improve the validity of data. First, include the expression “if anything”, to communicate that you expect some people not to do anything. You are likely to get more valid answers as a result. Second, provide a time frame in an intention question, such as “this year”. If you don’t provide a time frame, each participant will provide a different time frame of their own, making your data less reliable and valid.

“As a result of the symposium, what if anything, will you do this year?”

Question on Instructor’s Capacity to Motivate

For a question to capture the instructor’s capacity to inspire participants to change, you might ask:

How motivated are you to use the ideas from this symposium this year? (circle number)

- 1 NOT MUCH
- 2 SOME
- 3 A LOT
- 4 A GREAT DEAL

Note the time frame in the question on motivation.

Question on Delivery Method

You might be interested in knowing if some aspect of the delivery method that you included, was perceived as useful to the target audience. For instance, if your event concentrated on a single topic, ask:

If this symposium with a single topic, like today’s, were held in the future, how likely would you be to come? (circle number)

- 1 NOT LIKELY
- 2 SOMEWHAT LIKELY
- 3 MODERATELY LIKELY
- 4 VERY LIKELY

Note that the words “*likely* to come” will measure the target audience’s commitment more validly than if you had asked “How *interested* are you in coming?” Many, many people are often “interested” but not necessarily “likely to come”. For planning purposes, it is more important for you to know the latter.

Other tips to make the evaluation successful:

Response

- Aim to get 100% return:



- put the questions on hard stock on just one side of a half-sheet (see layout below).
- mention the evaluation in the introduction at the event. Note the importance of evaluation feedback in planning future events for this specific target audience. [See [Tipsheet #4 Introducing an Evaluation](#) for ideas by Patton (1988)]
- mention where participants should leave the evaluation, even if they have to leave early.
- place boxes marked 'evaluation' in strategic places so even people leaving early can drop it off.
- remind participants about the evaluation several times throughout the event.
- don't go to all this trouble to develop an evaluation and then be half-hearted or intimidated in getting evaluations back. A 30% return is not worth reading.

The above ideas about question selection and response rate shaped the evaluation of a Master Gardener event called "Designing with Perennials" conducted by Kathy Wolfe (kjw4@psu.edu) and her team in Schuylkill County. Kathy garnered an **87%** return from the more than 250 people at the event. In addition, believe it or not, she garnered compliments about the evaluation, i.e. "This was the best evaluation I ever filled out." "It was meaningful." "It was a pleasure."

CAVEAT. An evaluation of an event is *not* likely to be successful unless:

- the program is strong and
- the evaluation questions are specific.

Designing with Perennials: 2005 Symposium		
<p>How motivated are you to use the ideas from this symposium this year? (circle number)</p> <p>1 NOT MUCH 2 SOME 3 A LOT 4 A GREAT DEAL</p>	<p>My understanding of how to incorporate a reliable perennial garden in my landscape BEFORE the symposium was:</p> <p>1 NON-EXISTENT 2 MINIMAL 3 MODERATE 4 CONSIDERABLE</p>	<p>My understanding of how to incorporate a reliable perennial garden in my landscape AFTER the symposium was:</p> <p>1 NON-EXISTENT 2 MINIMAL 3 MODERATE 4 CONSIDERABLE</p>
<p>As a result of the symposium, what if anything, will you do this year?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">•</p> <p style="text-align: center;">•</p>		
<p>If this symposium with a single topic like today's were held in the future, how likely are you to come?(circle number)</p> <p>1 NOT LIKELY 2 SOMEWHAT LIKELY 3 MODERATELY LIKELY 4 VERY LIKELY</p>		

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