Reflective Appraisal of Programs (RAP):

An Approach to Studying Clientele-Perceived Results of Cooperative Extension Programs

RATIONALE

by Claude F. Bennett*
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Preface

This publication is intended for extension administrators, program staff, and evaluation staff who wish to understand why extension staff are being encouraged to use the Reflective Appraisal of Programs (RAP) approach to study the results of extension programs. The rationale provided herein may be especially useful to state, district, and county directors of extension who set policies for extension program evaluation efforts. Companion publications in the "RAP package--a guide and accompanying workbook--present step-by-step instructions and "planning aids" for extension staff who wish to implement a RAP study. RAP is based on the premise that county extension staff should take a leading role in studies of extension program results in counties.

This publication focuses primarily on the strengths of one approach—Reflective Appraisal of Programs (RAP)—for determining and appraising (evaluating) results of extension programs in counties. A secondary focus is on the validity of perceptual or reflective data. Comments on how extension staff can be trained in the RAP approach also are included.

RAP is only one of several possible approaches to formal program evaluation within state extension services. Other strategies include, for example, state-level studies of extension program results (as developed recently in Wisconsin and Ohio); a combination of state and county studies (as developed in Michigan, North Carolina, and West Virginia); and county extension program reviews (as developed in Florida).

State program staff may find this publication helpful in determining how they might assist county extension staff in evaluating program results. State program evaluation specialists may find the publication useful in clarifying and modifying their role in helping state and county program staff with extension program evaluation.

Acknowledgments

RAP was inspired by Patrick Borich of the University of Minnesota, who has persistently challenged evaluation specialists in Cooperative Extension to enable county extension staff to evaluate their programs. Development of RAP was encouraged and aided by students and participants in extension-staff development classes and workshops held at the following locations: University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri (1977); National 4-H Center, Chevy Chase, Maryland (1978); University of Minnesota, Duluth, Minnesota (1979); Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio (1979); North Carolina State University, Raleigh, North Carolina (1980); National Association of 4-H Extension Agents Conference at Detroit, Michigan (1980); and University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona (1981).

David Deshler, Peter Warnock, and Carolyn Boegly of Cornell University envisioned a potential use for RAP by Cooperative Extension in New York State. In December 1980, members of Cornell program teams (extension representatives and program coordinators) and Office of Director staff received training in RAP so that they could conduct RAP studies jointly with selected county staff. Carol L. Anderson, associate director of Cooperative Extension at Cornell University, coordinated efforts on these studies as a trial of RAP's suitability for statewide use by county extension staff in New York.

Much credit and appreciation is due to reviewers of draft copies of RAP; they raised the quality of this publication greatly through their incisive critiques and expert suggestions. Technical reviewers were Mary Andrews, Cooperative Extension Service, Michigan State University; Sue
Cunningham, Cooperative Extension, Cornell University; David Deshler, Cooperative Extension, Cornell University; Laverne Forest, University of Wisconsin Extension; Constance McKenna, Extension Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture; Michael Patton, Minnesota Center for Social Research, University of Minnesota; Kenneth Pigg, Department of Sociology, University of Kentucky; Joan Wright, Agricultural Extension Service, North Carolina State University; and Bette Lee Yerka, Cooperative Extension, Cornell University


I appreciate the assistance of Erica Fox, of Media Services at Cornell University, for greatly improving the clarity and readability of the RAP package.

The author is grateful to Mrs. Gloria Robinson, who exhibited truly awesome perseverance and patience in typing the repeatedly revised drafts of this publication.

Need for a Method to Study Results of County Extension Programs

Public and private funding for extension programs can be justified in several ways. First, extension, like other organizations, makes promises to people who finance its programs. These promises generally are statements of need and associated goals that are included in extension program and plan-of-work documents, budget justifications to policy makers and legislators, and public relations releases.

Another way to justify funding is by claiming accomplishments for past extension programs. Such claims generally are based on the casual observations of program personnel or on testimony from a few handpicked program participants. Sometimes, such claims are based on evidence of improved social or economic conditions, which the program is assumed to have produced or helped produce.

Promises and claims will continue to be important, especially in areas where funders already view extension favorably; legislators and policy makers who have had positive experiences regarding extension want to believe it is giving the public its money's worth. On the other hand, in areas where legislators and policy makers are unfamiliar with extension, or for some reason question its effectiveness, a third way to justify budgets is rapidly growing in importance: documented studies of the results of extension programs. Such studies are being used increasingly to meet funders' accountability requirements and to help extension develop improved programs. These scientific studies generally are conducted by social scientists, program analysts, and evaluation specialists at state, multi-state, and national levels. At times, program staff conduct or participate in these studies.

Studies of the results of nationwide extension programs are conducted for Congress and federal executives, while studies of the results of statewide extension programs are conducted primarily for state legislators, state agencies, university administrators, and other interested parties. State and national studies usually are supported by special budgets and take months to conduct.
Documenting Program Results in Counties

How do studies of the results of extension programs in individual counties fit into the overall pattern of extension accountability and program improvement? Systematic evidence on the results of programs is apparently often needed at the county level. County agents need such evidence to modify programs and to be accountable within extension, but there is also growing pressure from county legislators and executives for credible, generalizable, clientele-based evidence on program results. In addition, some volunteer extension program-development committees are requesting accountability information. Pressure for county-level studies tends to increase as the proportion of extension funding supplied by county revenues increases, as the county becomes more urbanized, and as public or private funding for special programs in the county increases.

A recent national survey on program evaluation in extension obtained responses from a representative sample of 1,520 county extension agents. One finding showed that 29 percent of the county agents viewed formal evaluations as "useful for the purposes of accountability reporting outside the extension organization." The authors of the study commented that "in states in which county extension programs are heavily dependent upon funding from county sources there is a tendency for county staff members to be strongly aware of a need to be actively engaged in formal program evaluation for the purposes of accountability. (These) county staff not only accept the need for formal, accountability-focused evaluation but are interested in being able to more effectively conduct such evaluation."\(^1\)

A related set of findings from the same survey indicated agents' average ratings of the usefulness of formal program evaluation for various purposes. On a five-point scale (5=very great extent, 4=great extent, 3=some extent, 2=small extent, 1=no extent), their average ratings were as follows:

- for purpose of revising and improving existing or continuing programs (4.3)
- for assessing new programs (4.2)
- for accountability reporting inside the extension organization (3.8)
- for accountability reporting outside the extension organization (3.6)
- for assistance in administrative decision making (3.5)
- for satisfying requirements of specially funded programs (3.3).

Directors of state extension services are asking county extension agents for well-substantiated reports on the accomplishments of extension programs in order to provide state and federal funding sources with examples of extension's impact. In connection with a symposium on the evaluation of extension programs,\(^2\) approximately 25 individuals directly responsible for formal evaluation of extension programs commented on federal, state, and county evaluation needs. By and large, their comments implied a need for county extension staff competency in program evaluation. A few of their comments follow.


In regard to the three levels of evaluation needs, I believe the most pressing need rests with the staff at the local program level.

We specifically need evaluation for accounting to county and state government. The form and content may vary between what is needed by county commissioners and by state legislators.

Can the meeting of needs for evaluation at the county level be structured in a way that will help to meet needs at the state and federal level as well? If so, how?

Are actors at all levels of government asking questions? Do we have to evaluate for all the various actors every time we evaluate?

How can we enhance coordination at all three levels?

There is an unquestionable need for separate but coordinated studies of program results at the national, state, and county levels. National studies draw evidence from several and sometimes all states; state studies draw evidence from several and sometimes all the counties in a state; but county studies draw evidence from, and may be generalizable to, a single county. State studies of extension program results can be used to exemplify national program results, and county studies to exemplify state and national results.

Who Should Conduct Studies of County Extension Programs?

Should or can county extension staff conduct studies of the results of programs in individual counties? Regarding who should participate in extension program evaluations, below are some relevant questions raised by some of the attendees of the symposium cited above.

How should we approach evaluation at the local level? Has our motivation of local staff to evaluate been handled properly? How can staff really be helped?

What type of entry-level background is needed for extension agents to be able to conduct program evaluation?

Local extension staff are educators with the responsibility for delivering subject matter in some specific area of expertise. As educators, they are expected to have the competencies that professional educators possess—the ability to design, deliver, and evaluate programs. Without all three competencies they are not effective educators and in reality operate intuitively rather than professionally.

The local extension staff definitely needs training and assistance in evaluating local programs.

To what extent should local-level staff do program evaluation versus state specialists and/or state-level evaluation teams?

Evaluation specialists seldom are available to conduct studies of program results in single counties or even groups of counties. And if county staff in a state annually conduct dozens of studies primarily for county decision makers, state evaluation specialists will be unable to provide
much assistance to each study. Thus, county extension staff must take major responsibility for meeting identified county needs for documented studies of program results.

In a number of state extension services, county staff are urged to collect, analyze, and interpret evidence in order to evaluate the results of extension programs. But staff frequently reply: "First, show us how to get credible evidence of program results without spending an incredible amount of time doing it!"

Most county extension staff do not have sufficient time or training to engage in rigorous evaluative research; they want simple and acceptable procedures for documenting the outcome of their work. They want information on the results of their programs that is of sufficient value to justify the work required to obtain it. In other words, they want information that will improve their accountability, their programs, their understanding of the programming process, and/or their morale and satisfaction.

**RAP: A Feasible Approach County Extension Staff Can Use to Study Program Results**

Compared with the expectations of extension administrators and their own expectations, county staff seem to obtain too little systematic evidence on program results. Limited time and insufficient training are among the reasons systematic evidence is not obtained; another reason is that, until now, there was little in the way of a practical, general method county staff could use to conduct such studies.

Using RAP's simple and acceptable method, county extension agents can now systematically document program results, and they don't have to spend an undue amount of time doing it. For example, an agent can obtain systematic evidence on the results of a one- to three-year extension beef-breeding program. Initial training generally would take about one day; conducting the study generally would take five or six agent workdays.

What is a "credible" amount of time that an agent should spend studying the results of a program in a county? Let's assume that an extension program requires 300 agent-hours per year (seven and one-half weeks). Then 45 hours would amount to 15 percent (45/300) of the time expended on the program. Furthermore, if RAP is used to study such a program conducted over three years, then the study would take only 5 percent of the total programming time. Finally, keep in mind that 45 hours is only about 2 percent of an agent's total annual programming time, assuming 1,800 hours are spent on programming per staff year.

**Features of RAP that Encourage Its Use by County Extension Staff**

1. RAP is a simple nonthreatening procedure for studying program results. RAP helps agents get a quick start at studying results of one of their programs. RAP emphasizes agent skills in group process rather than technical methods of program assessment. RAP standardizes and simplifies acceptable program evaluation methods for those with limited experience in formal evaluation.

2. RAP provides steps for studying the results of practically any extension program. With RAP's standardized interview items, agents simply "plug in" the educational methods, subject matters, and expected end results of the program being evaluated. This innovative,
easy-to-use, "fill-in-the-blanks" method enables county staff, with minimal assistance, to evaluate the effectiveness of their programs. Specifically, RAP is a standardized application of a levels-of-evidence model for evaluating the results of extension programs.3

RAP's interview items cover a broad range of events and consequences, rather than a narrow and detailed scope. The general nature of RAP's interview items allows a broad base of material to be covered within the confines of a brief interview.

3. RAP applies to programs aimed at developing individuals and groups as well as programs aimed at improving economic and social conditions. Included in a program on building management decision making among farmers and homemakers might be program content on evaluating and utilizing information; in a program for 4-H youth on building strong interpersonal relationships, generalizations about how humans perceive things and form attitudes might be included; and in a program for community leaders on meeting community needs, procedures for identifying and assessing these needs might be presented. The RAP items can be modified for any of these kinds of content areas. They also can be adapted equally well to the educational content of programs to improve economic and social conditions. Such programs might include facts on fertilizers, animal and human nutrition, or water supply technologies.

4. RAP provides an "on-the-job" method for evaluating program effectiveness. RAP provides more valid evidence of program results than casual observation would provide. In terms of Exhibit 1, RAP helps field staff advance from "self-checking evaluations" to studies done "on the job."

Exhibit 1
Degree of Complexity and Validity in Program Evaluation Procedures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Special</th>
<th>Snap Judgments</th>
<th>Self-Checking</th>
<th>On-the-Job Studies</th>
<th>Assignment Studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lesser</td>
<td>&lt;---------------------------------</td>
<td>Greater</td>
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As important as self-checking evaluations are, they can be very misleading. They are subjective appraisals by the provider of a program and as such can contain unacceptable error due to unconscious bias.4


4 This may be illustrated by the following example. "In a program of teaching speech to deaf children, teachers initially found the children's speech unintelligible. After teaching for six months, the teachers felt that the children's ability to make themselves understood had increased dramatically. However, data collected during the course of the training indicated otherwise. Tape recordings of the children's speech were taken at regular intervals during their training. Impartial observers
RAP studies may not rival those by people who have special part- or full-time assignments conducting studies. RAP studies are, however, as complex and valid as "on-the-job" studies by county staff can be expected to be. By taking an active role in studying how clientele view the effectiveness of extension programs, county staff gain firsthand insight into how to improve both their programs and their methods of reporting to resource allocation and support groups.

RAP encourages program personnel to participate in the collection and analysis of data, rather than rely on independent evaluators. Extension staff who implemented the program under study should do part of the interviewing and participate in the analysis and interpretation of the data. Firsthand discovery can enhance agents' acceptance of the study's findings and can motivate them to act upon such findings by presenting them with evidence from a cross section of the program audience.

RAP exemplifies a trend toward inclusion of nonresearchers in evaluations of educational programs. Windle suggests that as part of the natural history of a profession some of the skills become routine so that less specialized groups can perform particular roles in the profession. RAP is designed to assist those who have not specialized in program evaluation to perform a significant role in the formal evaluation process. With RAP, more counties can systematically evaluate their programs than is possible when they depend upon program evaluation specialists.

5. RAP encourages field staff supervisors, state program specialists, and volunteer leaders to help collect and use the evidence obtained from the study. Participation in RAP by volunteer leaders and state and district extension staff has several advantages:

6. RAP encourages field staff supervisors, state program specialists, and volunteer leaders to help collect and use the evidence obtained from the study. Participation in RAP by volunteer leaders and state and district extension staff has several advantages:

- People who conduct a study generally are more disposed to believing and using the findings than those who receive only a report of the findings.
- Whereas a county agent may invest as much as 45 hours in a RAP study, 135 hours might be required to plan and implement the study. Thus, a team approach generally is most feasible.
- If one assumes that extension has a responsibility to help build community and business leaders' ability to systematically evaluate the effectiveness of public programs, then by encouraging volunteer leaders to participate in the study, extension is fulfilling that goal. Lay (volunteer) committee members, county extension chairpersons (in cases where they do not lead the RAP study), district agents, and specialists are encouraged to conduct half or more of the RAP interviews. The county staff member leading the study conducts the remainder of the interviews under such an arrangement.

who listened to the recordings could not distinguish when given recordings by the children were taken-early in their training or late in their training. What apparently happened is that the teachers had learned the linguistic code of the children, the teachers had changed—not the children. See John M. Gottman and Robert E. Clasen, Evaluation in Education, Itasca, IL: F. E. Peacock Publishers, Inc., 1972, p. 2.

Validity of Reflective Evidence for County Users of Evaluation

RAP depends on reflective evidence, so-called because the interview procedure requires program participants to reconstruct (reflect upon) their feelings, behavior, and condition before, during, and following their participation in the program being studied. Interviewees estimate the amount of change they experienced or observed that can be attributed to participation in the program. This perceived "before and after" evidence of program effectiveness-reflective" evidence-is one way to deal with the attribution problem, namely, to what causes or influences a change is attributed. For example, in an area where farmers increased their production, what demonstrates that extension had a part in bringing about the change?  

Some social scientists, including some program evaluators, maintain that the only way to obtain adequate evidence of program results is by observing what clientele actually do and receive as a result of program participation. Such analysts contend that: (a) what clientele perceive, believe, and say are the results of their participation in a program is invalidated by what they want to believe in order to feel good about themselves and their past actions; and (b) that reflective evidence is invalidated by memory loss or distortion. People who accept this position are objectivists, for they favor using a natural or physical science model for evaluation studies. Objectivists rely on rigorous study designs to exclude or take into account other causes of clientele change besides extension.

Analysts who maintain an interpretive or subjectivist position emphasize that human experience is perception and that perception should thus be a focus of study.

Such analysts believe that it is both necessary and generally more feasible to obtain evidence on what clientele say they perceive to be the results of program participation. Subjectivists maintain that it is necessary to obtain the meaning of a program to its participants. For example, analysts who use perceptions to study program results maintain that:

- Perceptions allow respondents to interconnect events and to identify the cumulative effects of multi year, multi method programs.
- Perceptual data are more easily understood by study users who may not understand how numbers of changes in people or institutions indicate the value of a program.

The intent here is not to contribute to the objectivist/subjectivist debate, but rather to assert that subjectivist (e.g., reflective) evidence is appropriate for county studies of extension programs for many reasons, including:


Reflective evidence can be collected from program participants after their participation rather than both before and after and from both participants and non participants (comparison or control groups).

RAP’s "closed-end" (multiple-choice) interview items permit many possible specific answers to be recorded and aggregated within a few general response categories. For example, if a question asks the extent to which program participants implemented skills learned from an extension program, two respondents might both say that they put to use "to a great extent" the ideas or skills they learned about prevention of home burglary. One participant may have installed a superior door lock; the other may have inscribed identification numbers on his or her possessions.

Reflective evidence generally will be acceptable to the principal users of the findings-agents themselves, campus staff, volunteer committee members, county legislators or commissioners, state legislators and others who are "close to the extension programming process." Such people know enough about local extension programs to assess for themselves the validity of the findings and to interpret the findings in the context of their existing knowledge.

The information on program effectiveness that is gleaned from a RAP study is far more complete and valid than that found in most county-level extension reports.

Summaries of RAP studies can be included in routine channels for internal accountability and in regular means for reporting to county and state funding bodies and the public.

Reducing and Minimizing Potential Problems

Like any technique, RAP has limitations and potential problems; these problems can, however, be reduced and kept to an acceptable minimum. Five potential problems are identified below, along with suggestions on how to reduce or minimize them.

1. Vested interests of extension staff will bias the study. Bias generally can be minimized if the study is conducted by a team representing county, district, and state extension staff and volunteer extension leaders. Each of these groups has different biases and vested interests, so biases will tend to cancel each other out. The recording of open-ended responses is particularly subject to interviewer bias; if several interviewers conduct the interviews, however, a more valid pattern of responses should be obtained.

   It is most important that all those involved in a RAP study be aware of the self-defeating effects of bias. RAP studies will lose credibility if their audiences find bias in them. Finally, competency in the use of the RAP approach is perhaps the best guard against bias.

2. Lack of evaluation expertise by extension program staff can reduce the accuracy, completeness, and usefulness of the study’s findings. Trial RAP studies in Ohio and New York State indicated that extension staff teamed with lay leaders could do accurate and useful studies. As extension becomes more familiar with RAP, there will be an increasing number of exemplary RAP studies and increasing numbers of people experienced with the process.
3. RAPs standardized interview items may elicit results that are too general, vague, or incomplete. If the evidence from a RAP study is too general or spotty to adequately cover the results of the program being evaluated, then perhaps the scope of the study was too wide or not well adapted to the particular situation. RAP’s probe items will detect with some precision examples of what people did and/or received as a result of their participation in the program being evaluated. It is the responsibility of the RAP team to ensure that areas that are not sufficiently addressed in the standardized items are covered in additional locally developed interview items.

The staff implementing a RAP study may need assistance from a program evaluation specialist to ensure that the scope of the study is manageable. Such specialists also may be helpful in constructing or adapting interview items directed at issues that are not sufficiently addressed by the standardized items.

4. Reflective evidence on the results of a program may be based more on the interviewees' overall attitude toward extension and its personnel than on their perception of the actual results of the program being studied. People who feel positive toward something usually hesitate to admit to themselves or to anyone else that the results of that something (in this case a particular extension program) were not positive or beneficial. This tendency can be minimized, however, by judicious use of the open-ended (probe) follow-up questions suggested in the RAP guidebook.

If a significant portion of the respondents are unable to provide specific examples to support their general assessment of the results of their participation in a program, then the interpretation of the study's findings should reflect this. Furthermore, responses to the standardized items should be interpreted in light of their consistency or inconsistency with the open-ended responses.

A study of a program with a relatively limited scope is more likely to adequately elicit interviewees' perceptions about the results of a program than a study with a broader scope.

5. Reflective evidence may be invalid or not sufficiently complete if program participants have forgotten the effectiveness of the program. People frequently forget where or from whom they learned something. Thus, for a RAP study to be most valid (a) less than two years should have elapsed since the interviewees participated in the program, and (b) the program should have been distinct and forceful. Several additional techniques can minimize the effect of memory loss: (a) Adequately but succinctly describe the program to interviewees to refresh their memories of the program and their participation in it; (b) send a copy of the interview instrument to interviewees for review before the interview; and finally, (c) use the open-ended questions to determine whether an interviewee has a solid basis for his or her estimates of changes resulting from the program.

**Summary**

The Reflective Appraisal of Programs (RAP) approach provides county extension staff with a simple method for obtaining clientele-perceived assessments of the results of extension programs. Furthermore, the method is consistent with the readiness, strengths, and limitations of extension
agents to conduct such studies.

The "RAP package" includes the following:

- Guidelines for selection of the program most in need of systematic study.
- Levels of evidence that can be used to describe and evaluate clientele-perceived results.
- Standardized but modifiable questions for eliciting information from participants regarding results of the program in which they were involved.
- Guidelines for analysis, interpretation, and utilization of the study's findings.

Exhibit 2 on page 13 summarizes the advantages of RAP and how to minimize potential problems.

Appendix:
The Role of RAP in In-Service Education for Extension Staff

Hundreds of articles and books have been published over the past 10 years on program evaluation, and dozens on extension program evaluation. Specific, standardized procedures, however, rarely are included in such publications. I developed RAP because I found other approaches to evaluating program effectiveness could not be taught in brief workshops on extension program evaluation. Proof of RAP's success was quickly evident. After I began to use RAP's standardized approach, participants' ratings of workshops where I presented the approach rose dramatically.

RAP grew out of two professional experiences, one lasting over several years; the other, several months. The first experience—a frustrating one (a feeling shared perhaps by other program evaluation workshop instructors)—involved attempting to teach field staff within one day how to study program results. (Invitations from state extension services to provide such in-service education rarely were for more than one day.) The second experience—a successful one—involved helping an individual area extension staff member conduct a study of program results.

I tried two approaches at the one-day workshops, but found both unworkable. First, I presented optional ways of studying program results, thereby helping the trainees select from many alternative methods for obtaining evidence to evaluate their programs. Advantages and disadvantages of various methods of obtaining data—interviewing, mail questionnaires, observations—were presented (see Exhibit 3). Within the confines of the brief training session, however, most county staff were unable to develop an evaluation plan, given the "mind-boggling" number of possible methods of (a) categorizing program results, (b) involving people in evaluation procedures, and (c) measuring program results.

Providing workshop trainees with a variety of sample questionnaires, observation devices, and other instruments that have been used in evaluation studies did not help much either. As the participants tried to figure out a method to measure the results of their own work, they realized that few, if any, of the instruments fit their specific needs.

The second approach I tried, also in brief workshop situations, was to lead field staff trainees through a sample evaluation study. This case study approach had two advantages: (1) It enhanced communication during the workshop as the study and findings were discussed, and (2) it simplified the content of the workshop by reducing the number of evaluation methods being presented. But, by focusing attention on one study, however exemplary the study may have been, I tended to lose the
interest of the majority of the staff participating in the training. Extension staff have extremely diverse interests; they deal with vastly different audiences and subject matters. Within the same county, for example, some agents are interested in solving housing problems and clothing problems, while others are involved in solving livestock and grain problems. Within a single program area such as 4-H, programs may be vastly different, too, even within the same county. Staff are interested in finding out how to better document the results of their own programs, not in how someone else obtained such documentation.

The critical question seems to be this: How can the program evaluation methods discussed in a workshop be sufficiently specific to be easy to explain and easy to use, yet applicable to the extremely broad range of interests of extension staff? One answer is RAP. Its innovative, standardized interview questions allow program staff to "plug" practically any subject matter and educational method into its items. RAP is a specific technique for evaluating a program, yet it can be adapted to studies of practically any extension program, subprogram, or phase of a program.

The second experience that led to the development of RAP was my work with a former extension agent in Oklahoma, with whom I conducted a study on the results of a community development program. This study demonstrated in detail how the levels-of-evidence model could be applied to an evaluation of a multi-county program. RAP is a modification of the methods and interview items we used in that study. Once the references to the specific content and/or processes of the Oklahoma program were removed from the interview items, we were left with the first approximation of the "content-free" items that are introduced in RAP.

By presenting prestructured items within an overall planning, implementation, and utilization strategy, RAP makes it possible for county staff to produce well-documented, comprehensive evaluations.

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11 Claude F. Bennett and Donald H. Nelson, Analyzing Impacts of Community Development. Mississippi State. Miss.: Southern Development Center, Mississippi State University. 1975.

## Exhibit 2

**Summary of Strengths of RAP, with Corresponding Potential Problems and Suggestions for Minimizing Problems**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages of RAP</th>
<th>Potential Problems</th>
<th>How to Guard Against</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A. Organizationally Relevant</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Serves primarily county-level decision makers.</td>
<td>RAP will not suffice in providing the information on program results needed by state-level decision makers.</td>
<td>Formulate complementary plans for meeting state-level decision makers’ information needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Planning aids and standardized items for interviews help reduce time needed to study extension program results.</td>
<td>Staff who implement RAP may not grasp the logic behind program-evaluation study procedures. RAP users may fail to realize that RAP is only one of many program-evaluation methods.</td>
<td>Encourage staff to use RAP as an initial method to study program results but to employ other methods as their skills grow. Offer opportunities to learn about program-evaluation methods other than RAP.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B. Methodologically Relevant</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Volunteer leader participation in studies of program results ensures study legitimation, utilization, and assistance.</td>
<td>Reduced control of interviewing procedures, analysis, and confidentiality.</td>
<td>Select participating lay leaders carefully according to education, experience, and openness to training needed for their role in RAP.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. RAP’s standardized approach to program description and interview items covers most essentials while saving staff time.</td>
<td>RAP evidence may be too vague to be meaningful. Interviews may not elicit evidence on program nuances, critical incidents, and some types of program results.</td>
<td>Reduce the scope of RAP studies. Encourage RAP users to adapt and supplement standardized procedures as necessary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Reflective evidence on program results is easier to obtain than evidence obtained both before and after a program, requires minimal time, and permits estimates of results of combined educational methods/content.</td>
<td>Interviewees’ estimates of program results may be affected by their attitudes toward program personnel or extension or by limited recall ability.</td>
<td>Rely on probe questions to discount interviewee responses that seem to have no factual basis. Encourage “don’t know/don’t recall” responses when applicable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. RAP is a “do-it-yourself” method that does not require resources/guidance/control of the study by evaluation specialists or social scientists.</td>
<td>Program staff may view RAP as a means of obtaining only positive evidence of program results for public relations purposes and will therefore tend to bias the study findings.</td>
<td>Train competent teams, including volunteer leaders, to implement RAP. Caution that RAP studies will lose credibility if audiences detect unacceptable biases. Emphasize the value of negative findings for making program improvements. Reward staff for basing program improvements on RAP studies.</td>
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## Exhibit 3

### Alternative Methods for Collecting Evidence on Program Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Limitations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviews: series of oral questions</td>
<td>Personal contact</td>
<td>High cost per respondent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaires: series of written questionnaires answered and then returned through the mail</td>
<td>Flexible; permits follow-up questions</td>
<td>Time consuming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert Opinion: judgment based on people’s experience and competence in a particular study</td>
<td>Provides opportunity for expression without fear of embarrassment</td>
<td>Inflexible; discourages follow-up questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation: organized surveillance and analysis of behavior</td>
<td>Low cost per respondent</td>
<td>Low response rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of Documents: analysis of official papers that constitute the written records of extension program administration, including newspaper clip-pings, farm and home records, 4-H records, etc.</td>
<td>Many tangible and intangible factors can be taken into account</td>
<td>Human error and bias</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eyewitness account</td>
<td>Difficult to check information used to reach conclusions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Allows comparison of words and deeds</td>
<td>Human error and bias</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low cost</td>
<td>High cost; time consuming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Source of background information</td>
<td>Inapplicability of information “selective survival” of documents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>