Effective Impact Statements

UNH Cooperative Extension's (UNHCE) ability to effectively communicate the scope and ultimate impact of the educational programming we do is vital to the continued success of the organization, particularly when some stakeholders question using public funds for programs such as UNHCE. Impact statements, when written or presented well, can be used for a variety of audiences and venues to provide powerful messaging regarding the scope and depth of UNH Cooperative Extension. Communicating impact is everyone's job in this organization, even if you are not expected to write statewide impact statements. Many of the concepts presented here are just as relevant when giving a verbal update or presentation to your county advisory council as they are in writing a formal impact statement.

Key Elements

- Describes the results valued by stakeholders
- Contains compelling, significant facts and quotes from clientele (when appropriate)
- Tells who benefits from the program
- Answers, "So what? Who cares?" about the program activity
- Delineates Extension's role in achieving the program results

Format:

When writing formal issue statements, the following format has proven to be very effective. The goal is the keep the impact statement to about one page or it isn't likely to be read. If you are speaking to someone about the impact of Extension, this format is also a good way to frame your comments!

Issue

This is a succinct statement regarding what issue or problem the program addressed and why Extension is the very best organization to address it. This is just a paragraph (500 characters or less ideally) and the text will likely have similar components to the situation statement in your logic model.

- Common mistakes made when framing the issue – while some data (demographics, research that documents the issue, etc.) are very effective ways to support your issue statement, too much is a good way to stop the reader right there. Only use the most important data. Another mistake often seen is using this section to tell the reader what programs were done. Save that for the next section.
- Goal – A well written/spoken issue statement will leave the reader/listener thinking, "I understand why it is important for UNH Cooperative Extension to address this issue."

Example:

Numbers of farms that produce vegetables and fruits are increasing in New Hampshire, and consumer interest in locally grown food has also grown in recent years throughout New England. Between 2002 and 2007 the number of vegetable farms increased 36%, and the number of orchards increased 28%. Pests (weeds, insects and pathogens) can limit farm profitability through reduced yields. Research-based information from UNH Cooperative Extension about how to identify, diagnose or prevent pest problems can reduce costs and environmental impact of pest control strategies.

What has been done?

This section should briefly highlight what UNH Cooperative Extension has done to address the issue and who participated. It should also be brief (700 characters or less) and hit the high points only.

- Common mistakes made when explaining what has been done - This is often where Extension staff want to provide all of the details of their work but it's critical to keep this brief and only hit the highlights. Also, be sure to limit the use of jargon and define acronyms.
- Goal – This section should provide a summary of the work that's been done, where it was done and who/how many participated. The reader/listener should have a basic understanding of what we did, even if they don't necessarily have expertise in the topic.

Example:

In addition to individual farm visits throughout the state by Extension field specialists with focused expertise in fruit and vegetable production, six twilight meetings, attended by more than 150 fruit and vegetable growers were held in four counties across southern NH to share best practices in Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and 500 participated in the New Hampshire Vegetable and Berry Grower's and NH Tree Fruit Growers meetings. UNH's diagnostic lab and insect identification services processed 400 commercial plant samples and identified 150 insect specimens. Further, timely pest updates were provided via the web, instant messaging and FaceBook messages to more than 500 growers, providing them with information about damage reports across the state and recommendations for action.

Results

This is the most critical piece of an impact statement and should take up the most space (or length of time to talk about). This should be double in length to each of the other sections (1000 – 1400 characters) but not so long that people won't read or listen to the entire statement. A little bit of information about the data and how it was collected is appropriate as well.

- Common mistakes made writing about results – Many people restate (or wait to state) how many people participated or how many publications were developed and distributed in this section. People participating and publications sold, while critically important – don't communicate impact. Further, learning outcomes are also important, but it's far better to have behavior or policy changes that occurred as a result of our programs. Another common mistake is providing ONLY anecdotal information or quotes. While often these are powerful in supporting the reported results, some data is necessary. Qualitative or quantitative data are both good sources as long as some information about the rigor of the data collection and analysis is carefully described (again, avoiding jargon and academic-speak).
- Goal – Results should clearly communicate the answer to, "So what; who cares?" Clarity regarding social, environmental and/or economic changes are the ultimate impact, but behavior change in the target audience is often the highest level of impact evaluation we're able to complete so it's appropriate to report that here.

Example:

Fifty-four growers were surveyed at the annual New Hampshire Vegetable and Berry Growers' and New Hampshire Tree Fruit Growers' Meetings. Specifically, they were asked about the results of publications, programs (workshops, twilight meetings and conferences), and activities (soil/tissue testing, plant diagnosis, insect identification, etc.). Significant impacts include:

- *A high percentage of vegetable and berry growers reported that* ***programs including meetings, workshops, and on-farm twilight meetings sponsored by UNHCE*** *helped them increase their ability to identify, diagnose or*

manage pests (50%), adopt or try new methods of preventing or managing pests (30-45%), adopt or try new growing practices (45-55%), increase their knowledge of nutrient management (25-45%), or improve the way they market their crops (45-55%).

- *Over 55-60% of vegetable and berry growers and 47-60% of tree fruit growers reported that **direct contact with a UNHCE county educator or UNHCE specialist** helped them to increase their ability to identify, diagnose or manage pests or adopt or try new growing practices.*
- *Growers reported that the **UNHCE Vegetable and Fruit Newsletter** primarily increased their ability to identify, diagnose or manage pests (47-50%), but also helped them adopt new methods of preventing or managing pests (30-33%), increased knowledge of nutrient management (10-30%), and helped them adopt or try new growing practices (13-25%).*
- *Growers reported that the **NH IPM Newsletter** primarily helped them identify, diagnose or manage pests (30-57%), but also led them to adopt new methods of preventing or managing pests (25-40%).*
- *50-65% of growers reported that **Soil or Plant Tissue Testing** helped them to apply fertilizers based on crop needs; 40-50% reported that it improved their knowledge of nutrient management.*
- *Growers reported that the **NH Apple IPM Hotline** (27% of tree fruit growers), **Insect Identification** (30-40%), and the **Plant Diagnostic Lab** (15-23%) helped them identify, diagnose or manage pests.*

Tips for writing or speaking about impact

- Make sure it's easy for people not familiar with your work to understand
- Use active rather than passive voice
- Use short and complete sentences
- Choose simple words and avoid jargon
- Avoid acronyms (or define them)
- Use your title or program name instead of I or we
- Write in paragraph style with bullets for lists

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SAMPLE

Fruit and Vegetable Pest Management

Issue

Numbers of farms that produce vegetables and fruits are increasing in New Hampshire, and consumer interest in locally grown food has also grown in recent years throughout New England. Between 2002 and 2007 the number of vegetable farms increased 36%, and the number of orchards increased 28%. Pests (weeds, insects and pathogens) can limit farm profitability through reduced yields. Research-based information from UNH Cooperative Extension about how to identify, diagnose or prevent pest problems can reduce costs and environmental impact of pest control strategies.

What has been done?

In addition to individual farm visits throughout the state by Extension field specialists with focused expertise in fruit and vegetable production, six twilight meetings, attended by more than 150 fruit and vegetable growers were held in four counties across southern NH to share best practices in Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and 500 participated in the New Hampshire Vegetable and Berry Grower's and NH Tree Fruit Growers meetings. UNH's diagnostic lab and insect identification services processed 400 commercial plant samples and identified 150 insect specimens. Further, timely pest updates were provided via the web, instant messaging and FaceBook messages to more than 500 growers, providing them with information about damage reports across the state and recommendations for action.

Results

Fifty-four growers were surveyed at the annual New Hampshire Vegetable and Berry Growers' and New Hampshire Tree Fruit Growers' Meetings. Specifically, they were asked about the results of publications, programs (workshops, twilight meetings and conferences), and activities (soil/tissue testing, plant diagnosis, insect identification, etc.). Significant impacts include:

- A high percentage of vegetable and berry growers reported that **programs including meetings, workshops, and on-farm twilight meetings sponsored by UNHCE** helped them increase their ability to identify, diagnose or manage pests (50%), adopt or try new methods of preventing or managing pests (30-45%), adopt or try new growing practices (45-55%), increase their knowledge of nutrient management (25-45%), or improve the way they market their crops (45-55%).

- Over 55-60% of vegetable and berry growers and 47-60% of tree fruit growers reported that **direct contact with a UNHCE county educator or UNHCE specialist** helped them to increase their ability to identify, diagnose or manage pests or adopt or try new growing practices.

- Growers reported the **UNHCE Vegetable and Fruit Newsletter** primarily increased their ability to identify, diagnose or manage pests (47-50%), but also helped them adopt new methods of preventing or managing pests (30-33%), increased knowledge of nutrient management (10-30%), and helped them adopt or try new growing practices (13-25%).

- Growers reported that the **NH IPM Newsletter** primarily helped them identify, diagnose or manage pests (30-57%), but also led them to adopt new methods of preventing or managing pests (25-40%).

- 50-65% of growers reported that **Soil or Plant Tissue Testing** helped them to apply fertilizers based on crop needs; 40-50% reported that it improved their knowledge of nutrient management.

- Growers reported that the **NH Apple IPM Hotline** (27% of tree fruit growers), **Insect Identification** (30-40%), and the **Plant Diagnostic Lab** (15-23%) helped them identify, diagnose or manage pests.

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