10 Steps for Planning Educational Programs
Guidelines to Help You Complete the Worksheet and Develop Quality Programs

1. Situation

Study your county/area to assess the needs for educational programming.

What are the hot topics or key issues facing your constituents? How do those issues relate to your subject area/job description? For example, if the key agricultural issue in your area is soil salinity, you can begin to identify key contacts and educational responses that would support producer’s needs.

What are the environmental factors that might influence this situation? The environment includes factors that can influence outcomes but they are factors that we cannot control, such as weather, soil type, number of hours of daylight and geography.

Begin by developing a needs assessment to quantify the issues and problems. You might start with a focus group or county advisory committee to develop questions to gather information or to help with designing a survey.

What are the assets of the community? How could these assets contribute to solving the issue? Examples include active community clubs, school system, diverse population, strong community leadership community pride.

Use may decide to:
- use existing statistics for low-cost identification/verification of issues.
- identify other stakeholders to partner with and take a more comprehensive approach to the issue.
- Read more about gathering stakeholder input at: http://www.ag.ndsu.edu/programplanning/needs-assessment

Once you have gathered enough data to really understand the issue and identify partners, determine your role:
- what is it that I can contribute toward a solution?
- what is my area of expertise?

Is it realistic for NDSU Extension Service to address this problem? Do we have the research-base to support educational programming? Is this part of an existing program team’s plan of work? Who would I call to discuss this issue as I begin to make plans? It’s critical to have a basic understanding of what other programs have to offer.

Consider whether a team or individual approach is best. Who are potential partners with similar needs?
2. Target Audiences

Identify the target audience for educational programming.

Are you trying to reach Midwestern canola producers, parents of kindergartners, North Dakota community leaders or junior-high youth in your county? The general public is not a targeted audience. Clearly define whom you’re trying to reach.

What are the demographics of your target audience? How can you reach them/target them with your planned program?

Think about your target audience’s characteristics:

*Their personal histories.* Your target audience brings many personal experiences to the learning situation. Most people want the opportunity to share their experiences. Be certain to facilitate this sharing rather than just be the expert lecturer or offer a lecture from someone outside the community who is not informed of your specific target audience needs.

*Their preferred learning styles.* Very few people enjoy or learn best by sitting through a 50-minute lecture. The more diverse we can be in our approaches, the more effective the learning experience will be. Include time for processing, sharing, demonstrating, thinking about examples.

*Their family, work and social responsibilities.* Where does a learning experience fit in their daily priorities? How can the program be made most available to them? Where can they meet most conveniently if face-to-face is required? At what pace would they like to learn? Is one time of day better than another? Is your target audience already gathered through another group? Does technology make it possible for them to receive this education at home on their own schedules?

*Their motivation to learn.* Your target audience needs to see practical applications for what they learn, and they need to be able to use their new ideas and practices immediately. Use examples or activities that apply the concepts you’re teaching. Educators must create climates that minimize anxiety, where learners are accepted and free to disagree and take risks. Are the learners biased for or against any particular teaching methods?

Will this educational effort primarily be used for their:
- business (production ag, e-commerce, marketing, etc.)
- personal life (health, family, home, garden, etc.)
- community issues (policies and decisions on youth, environment, health, etc.)
- training to train others (train the trainer)
3. Objectives and Desired Outcomes

Define the objectives and desired outcomes of this program.

It’s very common for people to begin listing ‘things they can do’. This is a list of activities, but it is not a list of objectives and outcomes. Take time to really consider your written objectives and desired outcomes, in addition to activities, because it will provide you with the justification for all the work you will complete and the basis for an evaluation that will tell you if you made a difference.

What should the target audience learn and do as a result of your program? Make sure these desired outcomes can be measured. Most often a pre and post survey (or a post-then-pre methodology) can provide the evidence that your effort made a difference. Examples include:

After the educational opportunity,
- More youth are wearing helmets when driving atv’s.
- More fruit and vegetables are consumed daily by participants in the ‘Dining with Diabetes’ class.
- More farmers are soil testing before chemical applications.

What are the desired short-term results?

- Learning: awareness, knowledge, attitudes, skills, opinions, aspirations, motivations

What are the desired medium-term results?

- Action: behavior, practice, decisions, policies, social action

What are the desired long-term results?

- Behavior change of change of conditions: social, economic, civic, environmental

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure 1. Examples of Educational Objectives and Outcome Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Educational Objectives</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>10 migrant workers will attain “better housing.”</td>
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<td>30% of youth participants will reduce their use of vending machines to “save money” and “improve health.”</td>
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<td>15 dairy farmers will improve their farm income by 10% through “higher milk quality.”</td>
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What is your timeline for achieving your outcomes? Creating awareness happens more quickly than changing a behavior. Be sure to consider your desired outcome and allow enough time and effort to reach the objective.

4. Content/Subject Matter

Think about the content of the educational programming that will be needed to reach the desired outcomes.

You might want to freewheel, mind map or brainstorm with others to think about the content.

Avoid information overload. Too often we want to teach everything about a topic in one session. Instead, review your audience’s characteristics and focus on priorities. Limit the number of desired outcomes to limit your content. Start thinking about how the information can be divided into different learning activities. Learners appreciate smaller chunks of information that are carefully grouped and delivered using a variety of delivery methods. If the education is in person, allow time for them to process what they’re learning.

What level of interaction is desired or needed between the leader and participants? Among the participants? Does this interaction need to be live? Face to face? If so, why? If not, how else can interaction take place?

Finally it may be time to think of a motivating title for your program. Just remember, no clever title or logo will overcome a poor program.

5. Training Tools/Activities/Outputs

Select appropriate output activities for the target audience.

Now it’s time to think about how to teach this content and reach your desired outcomes.

How will you facilitate the learning process, not just provide information? How will you get the target audience involved in their learning and help them apply the information?

What are the best activities to teach this content, considering the content and the various learning styles of the target audience?

- Workshops
- Counseling
- Assessments
- Media Work
- Training
- Experiments

- Meetings
- Facilitation
- Product Development
- Recruitment
- Self-study

Experiments
Select appropriate specific training tools to carry out these activities.

Think about what a particular tool will and will not do and under what conditions it will work best. The latest technology may not always be the best for the content, the learners and your desired outcomes.

Select the teaching tools that can best work together to reach the desired outcomes for different learners:

- DVD’s, Game-based learning
- Publication/brochure
- Powerpoint/Prezi, etc
- Newsletters and news releases
- Web sites/webinars
- Videoconferencing
- Social media

Tie the teaching tools together for an educational package. Design the various teaching tools to reinforce concepts and fit together logically.

If this is a train-the-trainer program, decide who will train the program facilitators/deliverers and how they will be trained. Consider how you will evaluate outcomes with multiple facilitators as well.

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**Figure 2. Methods for Effective Program Delivery**

These methods are shown as examples. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experiential</th>
<th>Integrative</th>
<th>Reinforcement</th>
<th>Other Methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Method demonstration</td>
<td>Conference</td>
<td>Fact sheet</td>
<td>Mass media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Result demonstration</td>
<td>Seminar</td>
<td>Reference notebook</td>
<td>Photograph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-farm test</td>
<td>Panel</td>
<td>Publication</td>
<td>Bulletin board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-home test</td>
<td>Meeting</td>
<td>Poster</td>
<td>Show</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tour</td>
<td>Discussion group</td>
<td>Personal letter</td>
<td>Fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field day</td>
<td>Phone conversation</td>
<td>Newsletter</td>
<td>Exhibit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshop</td>
<td>Personal visit</td>
<td>Website</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Game</td>
<td>Office visit</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Skit</td>
<td>Online Contacts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case study</td>
<td>E-mail</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Role play</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Food tasting</td>
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Richardson, Jenkins, and Crickenberger, (1994).
6. Budget/Inputs

Estimate the cost of inputs, materials needed, activities involved.

What must be invested to develop and carry out the program? Include staff, volunteers, time, money, materials, equipment, technology and partners.

7. Marketing Plan

Develop a plan to market the program to the targeted audiences.

How will the target audience be made aware of and be encouraged to take part in this program? Why do they need this information? Think about outlets specific to the target audience. Where do these people already gather, or how do they prefer to get their information?

8. Implementation

Develop the training tools and carry out the program.

If the delivery method includes in-person meetings, consider:

*Physical environment.* Lighting, acoustics, temperature, distractions, writing space, seating arrangements, signage, parking, convenient access.

*Psychological environment.* Welcome learners personally as they arrive, have beverages and/or snacks, help learners feel confident about themselves and their learning ability.

*Social environment.* Help learners get acquainted with each other and with you, the educator, and provide opportunities for interaction throughout the learning experience.

*Cultural environment.* Be respectful of and sensitive to the cultural/ethnic diversity of learners and the values and experiences they bring to the learning situation.

If the delivery method is electronic, the physical environment becomes less important but the remaining elements continue to surface in your course design, interactive opportunities, and structure. Research indicates that encouraging active learning is key for all types of learning but how you structure this for an online experience is different than an in-person experience. For this first effort, you may want to develop a plan for an in-person opportunity and take time to learn more about educational design for online education before you plan an online opportunity.
9. Evaluation/Assessment

Were the desired outcomes met? How did the program make a difference for participants? Often this can’t be measured for months or even years.

Steps in outcomes-based evaluation include:
- Identify the objectives and desired outcomes. This was done in Step 3.
- Specify evaluation standards (indicators). What constitutes a successful program?
- Design evaluation tools and methods.
- Analyze the data.
- Determine if your short-, medium- or long-term desired outcomes were met.
- Report the results.

No longer is the number of participants or their happiness with the program enough. The short-, medium- or long-term impacts on their lives are needed.

If your program was designed to create awareness, then measuring increased awareness is the basis for your evaluation. If your program was designed to increase knowledge, then measuring knowledge gained is the basis for evaluation. If your program was designed to support action or a change of behavior, then more time must pass before you evaluate whether the desired change was made. Be sure to align your evaluation tool with your desired outcomes.

10. Reporting

Summarize outcomes / impacts and develop a summary or an Impact Report to share with participants, partners and decision makers.

Each effort or organization may have its own method of reporting impacts or results. An example of using an Impact Report for NDSU Extension Service programming can be found at: http://www.ag.ndsu.edu/impactreports

Adapted from Design for Learning by Joan Cybela and Edrie Greer, and Evaluating Our Extension Programs: Using the Logic Model by Ellen Taylor-Powell, both University of Wisconsin-Extension

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