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Spreading the Word About Extension's Public Value

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Abstract: In recent years, the idea that Extension can build support for its programs by highlighting how they benefit people who have no contact with the programs has taken root in the Extension system. Providing Extension program teams with resources, training, and leadership can lead to a body of public value messages that can infuse Extension's stakeholder communications. Hundreds of Extension professionals have received public value training, and survey results suggest that many trainees are following up with actions. Many trainees see positive effects from the public value approach, but measurable impacts will take more time.

Extension's Public Value

Extension program teams can readily provide evidence of their programs' *private value*, or direct benefits to program participants. They can produce program evaluations showing how individuals, families, or businesses gained from participation. They can share testimonials by people who have had positive experiences with Extension and even demonstrate that some are willing to pay to participate in a program. But Extension also creates *public value* when its programs induce participants to act in ways that benefit others in the community. For example, when an Extension program teaches a farmer commodity marketing techniques that will help her better manage risk *and she subsequently adopts those techniques*, she not only improves her own business outcomes, she contributes to a more stable local economy.

While direct beneficiaries of Extension programs have always been a source of crucial political support for Extension, demonstrating our *public value* can be the key to shoring up support from the rest of the population. As Morse (2009) explains, "Benefits to participants alone are not sufficient because of the way Extension is funded. If Extension were funded only by user fees, then knowing the private value, or the benefits to participants, would be sufficient." (Morse (2009), p. 224). But focusing on private value is *not* enough, as long as the public sector remains an important source of Extension's funding. Indeed, under persistent budgetary pressures, many Extension organizations have made demonstrating public value a high priority.

In 2002, the Building Extension's Public Value (BEPV) workshop was developed to help University of Minnesota Extension faculty identify their programs' public value and draft "public value messages," which they could use to better advocate for their programs (Kalambokidis, 2004)). Since then, various versions of

the workshop have been taught in at least 17 states, and hundreds of Extension professionals have been trained to teach BEPV workshops for their own organizations. Given this history, many states now have sufficient capacity to communicate the public value of their programs to stakeholders who matter. This article reports the progress toward that goal and should help Extension professionals decide whether and how to apply the public value approach in their states.

The Building Extension's Public Value Workshop

The Building Extension's Public Value (BEPV) workshop is directed at anyone who develops, delivers, evaluates, or seeks funding for Extension programs. The curriculum includes five core modules, with six more that can be included to achieve additional objectives. (Kalambokidis & Bipes, 2007a,b). A typical workshop takes between 4 and 6 hours, including work time. Without the work time, the key concepts can be conveyed in a much shorter presentation.

Organized into small work groups by program area, BEPV trainees are guided through exercises designed to achieve each module's learning objectives. If the workshop is successful, trainees will have identified stakeholders, who are not direct program participants, but whose support for the program would be valuable. They will be able to explain that a program's private benefits accrue to program participants, while public value accrues to everyone else in the community. Trainees will also be able to explain how *their program* creates public value, and they will have drafted a public value message—a concise answer to the question, "Why should your program receive public funding?"

The workshop curriculum encourages trainees to craft a message that is closely aligned with the program's logic model and evaluation results. The message should reveal the specific behaviors participants are likely to adopt, the outcomes that are expected to arise from those behaviors, and the subsequent benefits to the rest of the community. For example, a public value message for a Master Gardener program could be, "Homeowners who consult with Master Gardeners compost their yard waste, reducing the amount of solid waste in landfills and reducing the community's cost of managing its waste." Directed to a specific, non-participant stakeholder, the public value message will focus on the outcomes that matter the most to that stakeholder. In this case, the target is a community member who is concerned about the cost of waste management services.

Depending on which workshop modules are included, trainees may also emerge with a research agenda that will help them substantiate the claims their public value message makes about the program, as well as a plan for using the message in their work.

In addition to the face-to-face BEPV workshop, a BEPV train-the-trainer course is available as a 4-hour Webinar. Extension professionals who register for and complete the training may use the BEPV curriculum to teach workshops for their own organization.

The Public Value Approach Is Influencing Extension

In December 2008 I surveyed a group of Extension professionals who had gone through a BEPV workshop to learn how they have used the training and how their own public value work has influenced their organizations. The survey responses I summarize below were self-reported by BEPV trainees, and some of the questions asked for respondents' perceptions about changes to their organizations and programs. Therefore, the results should be viewed as indicators of the BEPV program's influence and not as precise impact measures.

Out of 400 people who were emailed a link to the online Surveymonkeyâ ¢ survey, 106 responded, for a response rate of 27%. Of those, six reported not having taken any BEPV training. The following tables summarize the responses of the 100 respondents who *did* receive some training. The tables report both response counts and percentages of those who answered each question. Because the number of survey respondents totals 100, in the text I note only response counts.

Table 1.
What Kind of Training Have You Received in Building Extension's Public Value? Check All That Apply.

Answer OptionsResponse PercentResponse Count
I participated in a face-to-face workshop.40.0%40
I participated in an online workshop.38.0%38
I participated in an online train-the-trainer course.29.0%29
I heard a short (one-and-a-half hours or less) speech or presentation.23.0%23
I read an article or other materials, either hard copy or online.15.0%15
I heard about it from a colleague.13.0%13
I have not had training in "Building Extension's Public Value."0.0%0
Other (please specify)3.0%3
***answered question*100**
***skipped question*0**

As shown in Table 1, the largest numbers of respondents reported having participated in the most intensive kinds of BEPV trainings available: a face-to-face workshop (40 respondents), an online workshop (38), and/or the online BEPV train-the-trainer course (29). Smaller numbers of respondents reported having heard a short speech or presentation, read about BEPV, and/or heard about it from a colleague. For 12 respondents, this minimal exposure was all they received.

A large majority of respondents (87) reported having received BEPV training within the past 2 years (Table 2). Only 11 received training more than 2 years prior to taking the survey.

Table 2.
How Long Ago Did You Receive Training in Building Extension's Public Value?

Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
within the past 12 months	44.9%	44
1-2 years ago	43.9%	43
longer than 2 years ago	11.2%	11
	answered question	**98**
	skipped question	**2**

As shown in Table 3, most survey respondents (90) reported having followed their training with additional steps toward adopting the public value approach. For example, 66 explained the public value approach to colleagues, 43 used a public value message when communicating with stakeholders, and 34 explained the public value approach to stakeholders. Others revised the public value messages they drafted during a BEPV

workshop, created messages for additional programs, and/or sought research to validate their messages. Twenty-one respondents reported having taught one or more BEPV workshops, for a total of at least 45 workshops.

Table 3.
Since Receiving Training on Building Extension's Public Value, Have You Done Any of the Following? Check All That Apply.

Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
I explained the public value approach to my colleagues.	73.30%	66
I used a public value message when communicating with stakeholders.	47.80%	43
I explained the public value approach to my program's stakeholders.	37.80%	34
I drafted public value messages in addition to the one(s) I worked on in my training.	33.30%	30
I taught one or more "Building Extension's Public Value" workshops.	23.30%	21
I revised or refined the public value message(s) I drafted in my training.	21.10%	19
I searched for or conducted research to validate claims about a program's public value.	18.90%	17
Other (please specify)	14.40%	13
	answered question	**90**
	skipped question	**10**

The survey included several questions about the impact of the public value approach on the respondent's organization and work. A majority of respondents (76) reported that the public value approach had influenced the way their organization communicates with stakeholders. Among those who supplied additional information, a common statement was that the public value approach had influenced the way their organization reports program impacts and outcomes.

Aside from the survey results, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension provides an example of an organization communicating to stakeholders with the public value approach. Easily spotted by anyone visiting the organization's public home page <http://www.extension.unl.edu/web/extension/home> on February 9, 2011, was a public value message for a private drinking water and wastewater Extension program. Below the message was a link to a document containing messages for programs across all disciplines (University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension, 2010).

A much smaller number (28) reported that the public value approach had influenced how the organization prioritizes its work. However, about a third of those who provided additional information said that the impact had not *yet* been felt, implying that it might over time.

Thirty-two respondents said that public value had influenced the organization in some other way, including improving program planning and reporting, affecting the type of research undertaken, and emphasizing the importance of going beyond reporting the impact on individual stakeholders to public level impact. Again, about a third of those who supplied additional information mentioned reporting of program impacts and outcomes.

Table 4.
Overall, How Has the Public Value Approach Affected the Following?

Answer Options	Rating Average	Response Count
your own work?	4.12	93
how stakeholders view your organization?	3.76	91
how stakeholders view your organization's programs?	3.74	92
funding for your programs?	3.36	90
	answered question	**94**
	skipped question	**6**

The survey also asked how the public value approach had affected various aspects of the Extension organization, with the results appearing in Table 4. On a five-point Likert scale ranging from very negatively (1), to no effect (3), to very positively (5), the most positive impact was on the respondents' own work (average rating of 4.12). Respondents reported similar impacts on how stakeholders view the organization (average rating of 3.76) and how stakeholders view the organization's programs (3.74). Strikingly, considering Extension's challenging financial environment and the short amount of time since most respondents received BEPV training, 30 respondents reported that the public value approach had positively affected *funding* for their programs. Of course, these results represent individuals' perceptions of an impact and not a measure of the extent that anyone's public value work caused—or even is correlated with—an increase in program funding.

Table 5.
If You Chose "No Effect" for Any of the Choices in the Previous Question, Why Do You Think There Has Been No Effect? Check All That Apply.

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
There has not been enough time for the public value approach to work in my organization.	62.90%	39

Not enough people in my organization are using public value messages.	43.50%	27
Other (please specify)	30.60%	19
Program funding is so scarce that public value messages can't help.	21.00%	13
Program funding is plentiful enough that public value messages are not necessary.	4.80%	3
The public value approach is not relevant for my work.	1.60%	1
My organization has chosen not to use public value messages when communicating with stakeholders.	1.60%	1
The public value approach is not relevant for my organization.	0.00%	0
Other approaches are more effective with my organization's stakeholders.	0.00%	0
	answered question	**62**
	skipped question	**38**

The survey asked those who reported no effect on at least one aspect of the organization (how stakeholders view the organization, how stakeholders view programs, program funding, or the respondent's own work) to choose possible reasons for the lack of impact. The most common choice (63% of those who answered the question) was "There has not been enough time for the public value approach to work in my organization." This is consistent with the indication above that the public value approach had not yet had time to influence the way Extension organizations prioritize their work. The second most common choice (44%) was, "Not enough people in my organization are using public value messages," and few respondents chose any of the other answers suggested by the survey question.

The survey results suggest some general conclusions about BEPV training. Specifically, it appears that the public value approach can positively affect Extension employees' work, how stakeholders view Extension and its programs, and even program funding, but it may take time for some of these impacts to be felt. Also, the strongest effect to date has been in how Extension organizations communicate programs' impacts and outcomes to stakeholders.

Two Examples of States Taking Action

Over the last 6 years, emphasizing Extension's public value has become a theme in the Extension literature. (See, for example, McDowell (2004), Debord (2005), McGrath (2006), McGrath, Flaxen, & Johnson (2007), Boone, Sleichter, Miller, & Breiner, (2007), and Cullen (2010).) Over the same time period, many state organizations have developed the capacity to create public value messages and deliver them to stakeholders. The experiences of two states, Minnesota and Missouri, illustrate the kinds of actions Extension organizations might take when they make public value a system-wide priority.

Naturally, the state with the longest experience with BEPV is Minnesota, beginning with pilot workshops in 2002 (Kalambokidis, 2004). Morse (2009) describes the role that public value concepts played in the 2004 restructuring of University of Minnesota Extension. Most significantly, during the restructuring, each Minnesota program team was asked to write a program business plan, which included a statement about the program's public value. Program teams had access to BEPV training as well as technical support for writing the plans. Additionally, some program funding was made contingent on the plans' completion, creating a financial incentive for teams to write public value messages. Indeed, Morse reports, "By 2006, every program had developed a public value statement." (Morse, 2009, p. 239.) Eventually, those messages were provided to Minnesota Extension's Regional Directors to use when marketing the programs to Extension clients, public officials, and funders in their regions.

During the Minnesota restructuring, public value concepts also influenced external relations, most notably when external supporters of Extension were included as participants in a modified BEPV workshop. In a chapter on external relations in Morse (2009), Jeanne Markell writes, "This new vocabulary about 'Extension's Public Value' would become part of the lexicon to discuss return on investment to stakeholders both within and outside of the university." (Markell, 2009, p. 81.)

More recently, University of Missouri (MU) Extension has taken a number of steps to make demonstrating public value a system-wide priority. This work has been lead by the MU Extension Public Values Education Team, a group of seven faculty and professional staff who completed the BEPV train-the-trainer course in 2008.

In early 2009, the team arranged for regional faculty across Missouri to participate in a BEPV workshop. They also developed a public value website, which provides resources to help faculty write public value statements, including BEPV workshop materials and examples of written communications that use the public value approach. The website also houses a process for reviewing draft statements and a list of those that have undergone review. By March 2009, 12 public value statements—two to represent each program area plus Continuing Education—were finalized and distributed to volunteers to support their communication with legislators during MU Extension's annual legislative day. Other public value statements are being used by faculty in their own program areas.

In Missouri, public value messages and concepts have appeared in county annual reports; in presentations to county commissioners and to County, Regional, and State Extension Councils; in a research poster; and in training sessions on program evaluation. Notably, the idea that Extension programs create both private benefits for participants and public value for the greater community is influencing the development of MU Extension's revenue generation and fees policy. The MU team expects a continued emphasis on Extension's public value to strengthen reporting to stakeholders, cement a shared organizational language about program benefits, influence decisions about resource allocation, and provide a framework for linking evaluation, fee generation, and program logic models.

Conclusion

In recent years, the idea that Extension can build support for its programs by highlighting how they benefit people who have no contact with the programs has taken root in the Extension system. The experiences in two states—Minnesota and Missouri—illustrate that providing Extension program teams with resources, training, and leadership can lead to a body of public value messages that can infuse Extension's stakeholder communications. Hundreds of Extension professionals have received some training in Extension's public value, and survey results suggest that many trainees are following up with actions, such as using public value messages when communicating with stakeholders. Many BEPV trainees see positive effects from the public value approach, but measurable impacts will take more time.

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