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AN ASSESSMENT OF THE INSERVICE TRAINING NEEDS OF MISSISSIPPI COUNTY EXTENSION DIRECTORS IN THE AREA OF PROGRAM NEEDS ASSESSMENT

By

Martha Jackson-Banks

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of
Mississippi State University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education
in Agricultural and Extension Education
in the Department of Human Sciences

Mississippi State, Mississippi

May 2009

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2009

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE INSERVICE TRAINING NEEDS OF MISSISSIPPI

COUNTY EXTENSION DIRECTORS

IN THE AREA OF PROGRAM

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

By

Martha Jackson-Banks

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Title of the Study: AN ASSESSMENT OF THE INSERVICE TRAINING NEEDS OF MISSISSIPPI COUNTY EXTENSION DIRECTORS IN THE AREA OF PROGRAM NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Pages in the Study: 115

Candidate for Degree of Doctor of Education

The purpose of the study was to address in-service training needs of Mississippi County Extension Directors in the area of program needs assessment. The population consisted of the 80 County Extension Directors; 2 positions were vacant. Eighty percent of County Extension Directors responded. County Extension Directors that responded by program area: 38 Agriculture and Natural Resources, 12 Family and Consumer Sciences, 4 4-H Youth Development, and 10 County Extension Directors that are Generalists. Sixty-one percent were male and 39 percent were female. Eight percent completed a bachelor's degree, 11% completed a bachelor's degree plus graduate work towards master's degree, 60% completed a master's degree, 14% completed a master's degree plus graduate work towards doctorate, and 6% completed a doctorate degree. The study used a descriptive survey research design. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations were utilized in the study. The Borich Needs

Assessment Model was used to analyze the in-service training needs of County Extension Directors.

Findings from the study indicated that County Extension Directors need in-service training on needs assessment. County Extension Directors reported below average competency in the following: analyzing survey data, interpreting statistical data, identifying sources of statistical data, and entering survey data into spreadsheets. The findings also indicated that County Extension Directors lack an understanding of how needs assessment impact funding of programs within Mississippi State University Extension Service. Findings show there is a need to re-offer training on the Strengthening Extension Advisory Leaders Curriculum since the result of knowledge and usage is extremely low. Additional finding revealed that County Extension Directors need training on the Logic Model.

DEDICATION

The achievement of the Doctorate of Education is dedicated to the memory of my father, Robert Lee Jackson Sr., my brother Robert Lee Jackson Jr. (Tennessee) and my Nephew Sebastian Campbell all died during this journey. Their adversities in life gave me the drive to continue.

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First, I acknowledge my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, whom has been with me all my life and who has given me the strength to improve my limitations. I also, thank him for his written word in which I find daily comfort. With God, I can do all things!

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Mississippi State University was established in 1878 as the Agricultural and Mechanical College of the State of Mississippi. It became part of the nation's land-grant system created by the passing of the Morrill Act by the U. S. Congress in 1862 (Hurt, 2002). At that time, the mission of the Cooperative Extension Service was to educate clients in agriculture, horticulture, and mechanical arts and incorporate other scientific and classical studies when applicable. The name and the mission have changed since 1878.

Today, the mission of the Mississippi State University Extension Service (MSU-ES) is to provide research-based information, educational programs, and technology transfer that focus on the issues and needs of the people of Mississippi, enabling them to make informed decisions about their economic, social, and cultural well-being.

The objective of the Mississippi State University Extension Service is to educate and empower people to make sound decisions involving vocations, families, and their community environment (msucares.com). The Mississippi State University Extension Service initiates positive change within individuals, families, and communities by:

1. Providing research and education in a practical and applicable way.
2. Using the latest technology and teaching techniques to serve clients. Developing and using volunteers to help disseminate programs and information.
3. Cooperating with other groups and agencies.
4. Maintaining a culturally diverse staff responsive to the needs of various audiences' at all socio-economic levels. (msucares.com)

Mississippi State University Extension Service continues to search for ways to help individuals cope with an ever-changing society. This is a critical need in human resource development. The primary task of Extension education is to disseminate practical and useful information on a broad range of subjects to diverse audiences. One of the major responsibilities of the Extension professional is to present unbiased facts that help people identify their problems and needs, and to guide and assist them in making their own decisions to solve these problems using the latest and most appropriate technology available (Prawl, Medlin, & Gross, 1984).

Statement of the Problem

Changes within the Extension Service structure require analyzing how local Extension Directors perceive and utilize county needs assessment. The information from needs assessment is useful in helping area agents and specialists provide training, resources, and expertise that will improve a county's economic, social, and cultural well–being. To be proficient in the delivery of formal and non-formal education, County Extension Directors must have a tool, such as needs assessment, to insure that county needs are being met. Therefore, to serve Mississippi, the County Extension Director's perceptions of needs assessment are vital in carrying out the mission of Extension. Also, in the Mississippi State University Extension Service Restructuring Plan (2002), the word "need" is mentioned ten times in the job duties and responsibilities of the County

Extension Director. This indicates needs assessment is the foremost job responsibility of County Extension Directors to Mississippi State University Extension Service.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine the in-service training needs of Mississippi State University Extension Service County Directors in the area of program needs assessment.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study were to:

1. Describe County Extension Directors perceptions of importance and competence in needs assessment skills.
2. Describe in-service training needs of County Extension Directors in the area of needs based on the weighted discrepancy model.
3. Describe County Extension Directors perceptions of the benefits of needs assessment.
4. Describe County Extension Directors perceptions of the implementation of needs assessment.
5. Describe County Extension Directors perceptions of their use of needs assessment results.
6. Describe relevance of County Extension Directors demographics among program of focus areas as it pertained to needs assessment.
7. Determine the knowledge and usage of Strengthening Extension Advisory Leaders (SEAL) Curriculum.

Significance of the Study

The Mississippi State University Extension Service has changed its structural makeup of job assignments and duties for personnel assigned to implement county level programs. The current job titles are County Extension Director, 4-H Youth Agent, and Area Agent in specialized program areas for Family and Consumer Sciences (Child and Family Development, Health, Nutrition and Food Safety, Leadership Development, and Family Resource Management), Agriculture and Natural Resources (Animal Science/Forages, Horticulture, Agronomic Crops, Forestry, Environmental/Nutrient Management, Risk/Farm Management, Wildlife/Fisheries, and Aquaculture), and Enterprise and Community Development. (MSU Restructuring Plan, 2002)

The County Extension Director is responsible for the overall program leadership in his or her county of assignment. There are 82 counties in Mississippi. Mississippi State University Extension Service provides leadership in each county. Restructuring of the MSU-ES has created a need to analyze how County Extension Directors view needs assessment. The Extension area agents and specialists use the needs assessment data to provide training and allocate resources to improve the county's economic, social, and cultural well–being (MSU Restructuring Plan, 2002).

Operational Definitions

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions and acronyms are used:

1. 4-H - A community of young people across America learning citizenship, leadership, and life skills (4-HUSA.Org).

2. Accountability - The responsibility of program staff to provide evidence to stakeholders and sponsors that a program is effective and conforms with its coverage, service, legal, and fiscal requirements (Rossi, Freeman & Lipsey, 1999).
3. Agriculture and Natural Resources - (Animal Science/Forages, Horticulture, Agronomic Crops, Forestry, Environmental/Nutrient Management, Risk/Farm Management, Wildlife/Fisheries, and Aquaculture) (MSU Restructuring Plan, 2002).
4. Communication-The process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behavior (Merriam-Webster Online, 2006).
5. Competency- A standard to which one is able to demonstrate a specific level of performance or knowledge on a specified task (Callister & Burbules, 1990).
6. Discrepancy Score- The difference between the level of importance and the level of knowledge given to a competency (Borich, 1980).
7. Gap Analysis - Technique for determining the steps to be taken in moving from a current state to a desired future state (Businessdictionary.com).
8. Generalist - Individuals during the period of transition that had no specific program of focus area. These individuals are known as no program of focus. In this study, the individuals are called Generalist.
9. Needs - Represent an imbalance, lack of adjustment, or gap between the present situation or status quo and a new or changed set of conditions assumed to be more desirable. Needs can be viewed as the difference between what is and what ought to be (Leagans, 1964).

10. Needs Assessment - The systematic process of analyzing gaps between what learners know and can do, and what they should know and do (Witkin, 1984).
11. Perception - The process by which organisms interpret and organize sensation to produce a meaningful experience of the world (Encarta.msn.com, 2009).
12. Program (Extension Education Program) - A planned sequence of educational experiences guide by specific objectives. Includes activities and events that are planned, conducted, and evaluated for their impact on identified needs of participants. Usually occurs over a period of time (Seevers, Graham, Gamon, & Conklin, 1997).
13. Program Area - One of the four core subject areas in which the Extension Service provides educational programming: Agriculture and Natural Resources, Family and Consumer Sciences, 4-H Youth, and Enterprise and Community Resource Development (MSU-ES Restructuring Plan, 2002).
14. Priority Program Group (PPG) - A team of extension professionals and researchers appointed to identify needs and plan program delivery and evaluation in a particular program focus area (MSU-ES Restructuring Plan, 2002).
15. Weighted Discrepancy Score - Statistical discrepancy between computer-related competencies needed and computer-related competencies possessed (Hoover, 1997)

Limitations of the Study

The following limitations were made in conducting this study:

1. In their decision to rate competencies according to importance and competency, it was necessary for respondents to make value judgments.

2. An expert panel and pilot test group reviewed items on the electronic questionnaire used to collect data to determine the content validity of the instrument. However, responses to the electronic questionnaire required some knowledge of needs assessment. Responses were limited to respondent's knowledge of needs assessment.

Assumptions

The following assumptions were made in conducting this study:

1. Conducting needs assessment activities is an important part of County Extension Director's job responsibilities.
2. Respondents possessed enough knowledge of needs assessment terminology to make judgments on importance and competency ratings.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

Parry, 1996 explained that thousands of organizations joined the quest for workforce competency development. Considerable resources are dedicated to identifying knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to perform jobs effectively and efficiently in the rapidly changing society.

The review of literature has been divided into fifteen sections. These sections are: (a) Introduction, (b)The Cooperative Extension System, (c) Mississippi State University Extension Service (d) Mississippi State University Extension Service Restructuring Plan, (e) Determining In-service Training Needs, (f) Needs, (g) Perception of Need, (h) Needs Assessment, (i) Group Processes Needs Assessment, (j) Strengthening Extension Advisory Leaders Curriculum, (k) Logic Model, (l) The University of Wisconsin Extension Logic Model, (m) Borich Needs Assessment Model, (n) Calculating Mean Weighted Discrepancy, and (o) Summary.

The Cooperative Extension System

The Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES) is an agency within the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), part of the executive branch of the Federal Government. Congress created CSREES through the 1994

Department Reorganization Act, by combining the USDA's Cooperative State Research Service (CSRS) and Extension Service (ES) into a single agency. This move united the research, education, and extension portfolios of both agencies and consolidated their expertise and resources under one leadership structure (U.S. Department of Agriculture-Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service, 2007).

Cooperative Extension Service (CES) links both the educational and research resources of USDA at the federal level with land-grant universities at the state level and county administrative units at the local level (Seevers et al., 1997). CES also leverages these federally appropriated formula funds from CSREES with state and local funds, and these funds are directed through land-grant colleges and universities to implement Extension programming for clientele. According to Seevers et al., Extension Service accomplishes this mission through the application of three conceptual models:

1. The technology-transfer model, whereby science-based results are disseminated from the researcher to the client in a format which can be easy interpreted.
2. The problem-solving model, whereby alternative solutions to group problems identified by clients are proposed and evaluated by Extension Service and appropriate action is taken.
3. The imparting-knowledge model, whereby skills generally taught in a formal setting Extension Service takes the educational process to clientele and are delivered in various formats such as workshops, short courses, field days, and interactive video conferences.

Issues within the counties are addressed by extension agents within CES. Extension agents work directly in the field and interact on an as-needed basis with

clientele, such as producers, suppliers, educators, youth, and the public at large. When significant issues arise that go beyond a local need and may require more specialized assistance or research, an Extension specialist is utilized. The specialist provides subject matter expertise and direct linkage to the information and research capacities of land-grant universities to address these issues. In this manner, CES indirectly links clientele and land-grant university-based research, allowing for appropriate interpretation of client needs, applied research, and subsequent information dissemination (Taylor & Summerhill, 1994).

Mississippi State University Extension Service

The Mississippi State University Extension Service mission is to provide research-based information, educational programs, and technology transfer that focus on the issues and needs of the people of Mississippi, enabling them to make informed decisions about their economic, social, and cultural well-being.

The purpose of Mississippi State University Extension Service is to educate and empower people to make sound decisions, which may involve vocations, families and their living environment. Extension initiates positive change for individuals, families, and communities through the implementation of the following five statements:

1. Providing research and education in a practical and applicable way.
2. Using the latest technology and teaching techniques to serve clients.
3. Developing and using volunteers to help disseminate programs and information.
4. Cooperating with other groups and agencies.
5. Maintaining a culturally diverse staff responsive to the needs of various audiences' at all socio-economic levels. (msucares.com)

In this ever-changing society, Mississippi State University Extension Service recognizes the critical need for human resource development and continues to explore

ways to help individuals cope. The primary task of extension education is that of disseminating practical and useful information on a broad range of subjects. The role of the extension professional is to present unbiased information that helps people identify problems and needs, and to guide and assist them in making their own decisions to solve these problems using the latest and most appropriate technology available.

Mississippi State University Extension Service Restructuring Plan

The past decade and a half has brought major changes to Extension. Many states have re-organized the structure of extension, reduced staff, and introduce interdisciplinary teams and partnerships to implement programs. Administrators have increasingly used outcome-based evaluations in pursuit of greater accountability, reached out to new clientele, and begun delivering services using sophisticated communication technologies rather than face-to-face methods. The critical question is whether these efforts have changed people's perceptions and use of extension programs (Warner, Christenson, Dillman, & Salant, 1996). Goal identification and prioritization are central to building collaborative relationships for community problem solving (Mattessich & Money, 1998). The County Extension Director provides leadership and coordination for the total extension education effort in agriculture and natural resources, family and consumer sciences, 4-H youth development, and community resource development. He or she consults and maintains a positive relationship with appropriate local program advisory groups, community leaders, public officials, representatives of target audiences, and the county extension executive board to analyze data and identify needs. The County Extension Director also develops measurable goals and an annual plan of work in collaboration with the appropriate agents, specialists, and priority program group (PPG).

A County Extension Director communicates, coordinates, and facilitates the delivery of educational activities to accomplish program plans while accommodating unplanned needs (MSU-ES Restructuring Plan, 2002).

County Extension Directors administer all appropriate and necessary local supervisory and administrative responsibilities, assure compliance with civil rights and affirmative action policies as well as extension and university policies, and demonstrate personal community involvement and sensitivity to key public issues with educational regulatory and service organizations whose missions are relevant to the goals of Extension (MSU-ES Restructuring Plan, 2002).

According to the MSU-ES Restructuring Plan, County Extension Directors' major job duties and responsibilities are:

1. Organize, maintain, and consult with the county extension executive board, appropriate local program advisory groups, community leaders, public officials, and representatives of intended audiences to analyze data, identify needs, and assist in developing educational programs.
2. Identify and organize information regarding clientele needs for all program areas in the county (except 4-H if the county has a 4-H Youth Agent) and assess the relevance, significance, and timeliness of identified needs.
3. Share needs/issues identified with the appropriate area agent(s), specialist(s), and priority program group(s) and develop realistic plans to address identified needs and determine priorities, levels of effort, and scheduling to allow attainment of program goals.
4. Develop an annual plan of work, and measurable goals that adequately address adult and youth program needs and the role of the County Extension Director in providing leadership and coordination for the total county extension program.
5. Implement program plans to accomplish goals while accommodating unplanned needs.
6. Communicate, coordinate, and facilitate delivery of educational activities to address needs with the involvement of other agents and appropriate resource staff.
7. Develop and facilitate delivery of programs targeted for underserved audiences.
8. Recruit, manage, and maintain volunteers to support county needs/efforts in all program areas (except 4-H Youth if a county has a 4-H Youth Agent).
9. Manage the schedule and coordinate use of local offices/facilities and equipment to provide efficient delivery of activities/programs to address needs.
10. Provide appropriate responses to day-to-day reactive situations.

11. Evaluate program content, methods and activities, and impact. Share evaluation results with appropriate agents and other staff to improve program delivery.
12. Support local 4-H Youth staff in the development and implementation of 4-H Youth programs and activities (if program focus is in an area other than 4-H Youth).
13. Work as an effective team member by building, maintaining, and enhancing positive relationships with extension staff to enhance program effectiveness and organizational effort.
14. Provide documentation for all county program efforts and assure compliance with civil rights and affirmative action policies.
15. Prepare and manage the local county budget.
16. Supervise county office associates, program associates and assistants, and other resource personnel to ensure efficient program delivery and response to requests.
17. Evaluate county support staff, and provide input into the evaluation of other professionals serving the county to appropriate administrative leaders.
18. Coordinate the local employment process of support staff and the related documentation in accordance with MSU-ES guidelines.
19. Manage county postal allotment, and supervise and audit local accounts.
20. Complete all appropriate and necessary administrative responsibilities. (2002, p. 27-28)

County extension agents, program assistants, and associates depend on specialists for information and publications. Specialists have expertise in locating and interpreting complex information for agents (Kawasaki, 1994). Specialists are key individuals in providing the technical information that drives county extension programming (Warner & Christenson, 1984; Prawl et al., 1984). According to Boyle (1996), the linkage between extension specialists and county agents is the bridge between people's needs and the knowledge base of the university.

Extension specialists have the responsibility to synthesize, evaluate, integrate, and apply research information and expertise within the land-grant university system in support of county programming efforts (Taylor & Summerhill, 1994).

Determining In-service Training Needs

Priority Program Groups in-service trainings are determined by administration as well as by the recommendations by county extension staff. Several studies reveal that extension specialists are one of the primary sources of information for county agents (Radhakrishna & Thompson, 1996; Shih & Evans, 1991). Gibson and Hillison (1994), suggest that effective specialists must understand the extension education process. In addition, they must understand the human development, learning, and social interaction processes, and must become knowledgeable about the organization in which they work (Gibson & Hillison, 1994; Baker & Vallalobos, 1997; Radhakrishna, 2001). Since extension specialists are a primary source of information for county agents, it is important that they understand agent needs and be inclusive in offering their in-service trainings (Radhakrishna & Thompson, 1996; Shih & Evans, 1991). State Extension faculty may not fully understand their role in the programming process, especially in developing resource materials, providing in-services, and in evaluating programs relative to timely issues identified as county needs (Baker & Villalobos, 1997).

Factors, such as advances in technology, changes in the numbers and types of clientele, increased operating costs, and reduced funding require significant changes in resource allocations, organizational structure, and extension procedures for conducting business. Harriman and Daugherty (1992) predicted that the future of the Cooperative Extension System will be significantly different from the past. Future changes will be more challenging to predict and require greater and faster adaptation. To be successful in this type of rapidly changing environment, future extension leaders must not only know what types of changes are needed, but they must also have the tools and skills to

implement change so that resistance decreases and "buy-in" increases with clientele and employees (Washington & Fowler, 2005).

Need

Boone, Safrit and Jones, 2002 cited Tyler (1949) and Queeney (1995) defining of needs as "the difference between the present condition of the learner and an acceptable norm" (p. 143).Witkin and Altschuld (1995), agree with other researchers that the whole idea of need is a difficult concept to grasp because of the ambiguity in the language. The word need has different meanings as a noun or a verb. Need as a noun refers to "the gap or discrepancy between a present state (what is) and a desired end state, future state, or condition (what should be). Need is neither the present nor the future state; it is the gap between them. Need as a verb points to what is required or desired to fill the discrepancy solutions, means to an end" (p. 9). According to Leagans (1964), "needs represent an imbalance, lack of adjustment, or gap between the present situation or status quo and a new or changed set of conditions assumed to be more desirable" (p. 89).

According to Maslow (1970) cited by Boone et al., 2002:

> Needs may be arranged from lowest and most fundamental to the highest. Maslow explains that individuals must first acquire the most basic needs, which is physiological survival needs, before they can attend to those of higher levels. Within this hierarchy, a higher-level need is not activated until the individual has attained some level of satisfaction of the need (s) below it. (p. 143)

The hierarchy of needs from the lowest to the highest consists of:

- Physiological Survival Needs
- Safety and Security Needs
- Belongingness and Love Needs
- Esteem Needs
- Cognitive Needs
- Aesthetic Needs
- Need for Self-Actualization

On a whole, an individual cannot satisfy any high level need until the lower level is met. Boone et al., 2002 cited Maslow (1970) has three principles of operation for these needs:

1. gratification of the needs in each level, starting with the lowest, frees a person for higher levels of gratification,
2. those persons in whom a need has been satisfied are best equipped to deal with deprivation of that need in the future; and
3. healthy persons are those whose basic needs have been met so that they are principally motivated by the need to actualize their highest potentialities. (p. 143)

Dixon (2003) explained that in understanding needs one must understand Maslow's "Needs Hierarchy Theory" to study and to determine what causes people to change themselves and their communities to meet needs. Also, that the hierarchy theory is particularly relevant when looking at needs in relation to the community or County. According to Homan (1999), "a need community includes those people who currently experience the problem or could benefit from its resolution substituting the term gap the difference between what is and what should be" (as cited in Boone et al., p. 144).

Perception of Need

The concept of perception is important in the development of needs assessment that determines the perceived or felt needs of people (Dixon, 2003). Warner (1994) said, "Perception is a dynamic, cumulative, and individual phenomenon that is continually changing within the organism" (p. 49). Bartley (1969) defined "perception by contrasting with sensation. Sensation is passive; perception is active. Sensation need not occur for perception to occur. Sensation is an experience; perception is a use of information" (p. 6). He also explains perception as the "immediate response to a set of external conditions, or

a set of internal body conditions in which the mediating tissue is a sense organ" (p. 4). According to Hillier and Barrow (1999), perception is the "process of evaluating the sensory information carried to the brain" (p. 104). Dixon (2003) found that "individuals may perceive the same stimuli differently: further, the same person may react differently at different times" (p. 237).

Sonderegger (1998) explains that:

> Perception is the way that sensory information is chosen and transformed so that it has meaning. Once sensory input starts, an individual uses perceptual processes to select among sensory input stimuli and to organize them so that relevant action can occur. Attention is when events occur simultaneously in the environment to pay attention to all of them at once, so selective attention is used to focus on those stimuli relevant to current activity. (p. 4)

According to Sonderegger (1998), "the manner in which stimuli are arranged "that is" grouped, affects their perception stimulus characters that affect organization" (p. 45).

Needs Assessment

The existence of needs assessment has been traced back several thousands of years (Tuomisto, 1981). Current thinking about needs assessment, however, is largely attributed to John Dewey's learner-oriented approach developed in the early part of the century. Tyler (1949) proposed that needs assessment could be a reaction to relieve the forces that cause situational imbalance, lack of adjustment, or deficiency.

Needs assessment is a process for identifying gaps in results and arranging them in priority order for resolution. These gaps are discrepancies between what should be and what the current conditions are. Needs assessment can be used in several ways. Sometimes the gap between "what is" and "what should be" establishes the objectives for programs. Needs assessment will also help select the strategy a program might use.

Conducting needs assessment provides many advantages to individuals planning collaborative efforts. A major advantage is the generation of new ideas and alternatives for dealing with needs (Archer, Cripe, & McCaslin, 2001).

The needs assessment is a concept familiar to grassroots involvement, which has helped Extension maintain relevance with clientele for many decades. To be most efficient at developing and implementing quality educational programs, it is imperative that Extension partners with community leaders in the areas of Agricultural and Natural Resources, Family and Consumer Sciences, 4-H Youth Development, and Community and Economic Development (Cummings & Boleman, 2006).

Needs assessment is a critical element of effective extension programming and one of the key components of extension work. Information gathered from evaluations "is critical for documenting program impact, making changes for future programs, and identifying additional goals and objectives for future programming" (Seevers et al., 1997).

Extension professionals work in an environment where assessment data is necessary for planning action, communicating to external stakeholders, and training volunteers and community partners (O'Connor & Zeldin, 2005). Extension professionals are in the business of helping people identify needs, and then responding with the information necessary to meet those needs (Beckley & Smith, 1985). A well thought-out, documented needs assessment is not only beneficial to the extension educator, but may also be valuable to others who work with or for similar clientele (Caravella, 2006). The following factors influence the collaborative process: communication, sustainability, research and evaluation, political climate, resources, catalysts, policies, laws, regulations,

history, connectedness, leadership, community development, and understanding of the community (Borden & Perkins, 1999).

Earlier studies reinforce that needs assessment are necessary in program development. However, this recommendation did not seem to be based on an analysis of need or needs assessment, but was likely stated in response to preconceived notions about needs or findings inconsistent with expected outcomes. Decisions are likely to be based on familiar settings and techniques at the expense of trends and innovation. This diagnosis indicates needs is often shaped by present conditions (Veres, 1980).

Needs assessment has long been an important community development tool, but it is often expensive to undertake. Needs assessment can identify unmet needs in the community, provide evidence of support for policy options, and increase public involvement in policy making (Israel & Ilvento, 1995).

Extension educators regularly conduct needs assessment surveys to develop programs to meet client education needs (Ahmann, 1979; Gilmore, 1989; Malmsheimer, Germain and Faculty of Forest and Natural Resources Management, 2002). These surveys are particularly prevalent in continuing education programs, where rapidly expanding knowledge, technical innovations, and public demand for professional competence require specialists to constantly increase their skills and knowledge (Queeney, 1995).

Boyle (1991) and subsequent authors have noted that the use of advisory committees is helpful in bringing about greater accuracy in decision making, speeding the process of change, assisting people to identify their most critical problems, involving people in the planning process as a learning experience, and providing public relations

and support for the extension program. County extension agents and program assistants depend on specialists for information and publications.

According to Boyle (1996), the linkage between extension specialists and county agents is the bridge between people's needs and the knowledge base of the university. Extension specialists have the responsibility to synthesize, evaluate, integrate, and apply research information and expertise from within the land-grant university system in support of county programming efforts (Taylor & Summerhill, 1994).

Several studies reveal that extension specialists are one of the primary sources of information for county agents (Radhakrishna & Thompson, 1996; Shih & Evans, 1991). Gibson and Hillison (1994) suggest that effective specialists must understand the Extension education process. In addition, they must understand the human development, learning, and social interaction processes, and they must become knowledgeable about the organization within which they work (Gibson & Hillison, 1994; Baker & Vallalobos, 1997; Radhakrishna, 2001).

Since district and state extension specialists are a primary source of information for county agents, it is important that they understand their needs and be inclusive in their in-services (Radhakrishna & Thompson, 1996; Shih & Evans, 1991). State Extension faculty may not fully understand their role in the programming process, especially in developing resource materials, providing in-services, and in evaluating programs relative to timely issues identified as County needs (Baker & Villalobos, 1997; Conklin, Hook, Kelbaugh, & Nieto, 2002).

Factors, such as advances in technology, changes in the numbers and types of clientele, increased operating costs, and reduced funding require significant changes in

resource allocations, organizational structure, and the extension procedure for conducting business. Educational programs delivered by extension agents today are more varied than ever and will continue to change to meet the needs of the clientele they serve. Extension agents must possess the necessary skills and experiences to not only conduct their programs, but also systematically evaluate program outcomes and impact (Radhakrishna & Martin, 1999). Extension educators are a key to understanding client needs and their knowledge base to develop statewide program initiatives (Schneider & Smallidge, 2000; Koukel & Cummings, 2002; Kaplan, Liu, & Radhakrisna, 2003).

Group Process of Needs Assessment

Witkin and Altschuld (1995) stated, that "group processes are the most widely used method for gathering opinions and data for needs assessment. The group process is widely used because it demonstrates the willingness and interest of the needs assessors to understand the views of stakeholders" (p. 153).

Witkin and Altschuld (1995) stated the main purposes of group processes are to:

> determine areas of concern to the community, to identify frames of references and perspectives held about needs, to identify potential priorities of the community, to determine possible solutions and courses of action that might be acceptable to stakeholder group. Group processes are valuable sources for historical or contextual information regarding the need area, determining causes of needs, and providing input to priorities for action. (p. 154)

Mississippi State University Extension Service utilizes the county extension executive board, appropriate local program advisory groups, community leaders, public officials, and representatives of intended audiences to gather needs assessment. This is essential because this confirms that resources and in-service training should be utilized to

insure this process is done in an effective manner. A resource tool that was created to assist in this effort is the Strengthening Extension Advisory Leaders Curriculum.

Strengthening Extension Advisory Leaders Curriculum

The Strengthening Extension Advisory Leaders (SEAL) Curriculum was derived from the Summary Report of the Southeast Leadership Conference that ten states participated in 2001. The purpose of the conference was to gather baseline data about advisory leadership in the South, share resources and ideas, and learn how successful systems operate (Summary Report Southeast Advisory Leadership Conference, compiled and edited by Groff, 2001). The conference participants learned they had a host of resources, but not one system had all the resources.

The results of the summary and brainstorming lead to the conception of the SEAL Curriculum. The following Cooperative Extension Systems input resources: Virginia, North Carolina, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences at Florida, Clemson University, Kentucky, and Mississippi State University. These systems make up SEAL Curriculum, 2003. The SEAL 2003 Curriculum gives an overview on the following: Cooperative Extension, Extension Advisory Leadership System, and relationships surrounding Extension Advisory Leadership Systems.

The first section is called Ramping Up for Successful s which covers the following:

- Who's Who for ALS
- Critical input of Advisory Leaders
- Programming Function of Advisory Leadership
- Being an Advocate, and Relationship Marketing
- Expectations and Proficiencies

The second section, called Organizing Effective Meetings, covers the following:

- Facilitating and Managing Group Participation
- Order in the Court: Using Parliamentary Procedure
- The Skilled Group Leader: Resolving Conflict
- The Skilled Group Leader: Setting the Stage
- The Skilled Group Leader: Tool for Effective Group Discussion

The last section, called Setting Program Priorities, covers:

- The Skilled Group Leader: Setting Priorities
- Introduction to Assessing Community Needs
- Assessing Community Needs through Key Informants
- Assessing Community Needs through Attitude Surveys
- Assessing Community Needs with Group Sessions
- Interpreting Multiple Types of Needs Data

The SEAL Curriculum is a tool which can be utilized to strengthen the county base program as well as provide the needed information in the first step of the Logic Model.

Logic Model

The first step in the University of Wisconsin Extension Logic Model (Figure 2.1) is situational analysis, which involves analyzing needs and assets, problem diagnosis, and examining relevant research, knowledge and experience. This confirms the vital role needs assessment plays in Mississippi State University Extension Service.

CRSEES explains a Logic Model is a conceptual tool for planning and which displays the sequence of actions that describes what the science-based program is and will do. CRSEES states that a Logic Model:

- Clarifies the linkage evaluation between investments and activities, outputs and expected outcomes of the policy, program or initiative;
- Communicates externally about the rationale, activities and expected results of the policy, program or initiative;
- Tests whether the policy, program or initiative "makes sense" from a logical perspective; and
- Provides the fundamental framework on which the performance measurement and evaluation strategies are based (CSREES, 2007).

The University of Wisconsin Extension Logic Model

The Logic Model (Appendix A, permission was granted to use Figure 2.1), was designed to assist in planning, implementing, evaluating, and communicating more effectively, (Taylor-Powell & Henert, 2008). The Logic Model demonstrates the sequence of how a program is expected to achieve its desired results. The steps in the Logic Model are:

- Situational Analysis: Extension programs exist within a situation or environment that is often complex and changing. Understanding the situation is the beginning step in designing the educational response.

- Priority Setting: Program priority setting builds on the foundation created by the situational analysis. Program priorities need to be established with an understanding of the resources that are available to help achieve the required outcomes and impact. Priority setting leads to the identification of intended outcomes. (University of Wisconsin Extension Logic Model, 2005)

The Logic Model has five core components:

Inputs: resources, contributions, investments that go into the program

1. Outputs: activities, services, events and products that reach people who participate or who are targeted
2. Outcomes: results or changes for individuals, groups, communities, organizations, or systems
3. Assumptions: the beliefs we have about the program, the people involved, and the context and the way we think the program will work
4. External Factors: the environment in which the program exists includes a variety of external factors that interact with and influence the program action
5. Evaluation: A critical role in learning, program improvement and accountability so programs outcomes are evaluated. (University of Wisconsin Extension Logic Model, 2005)

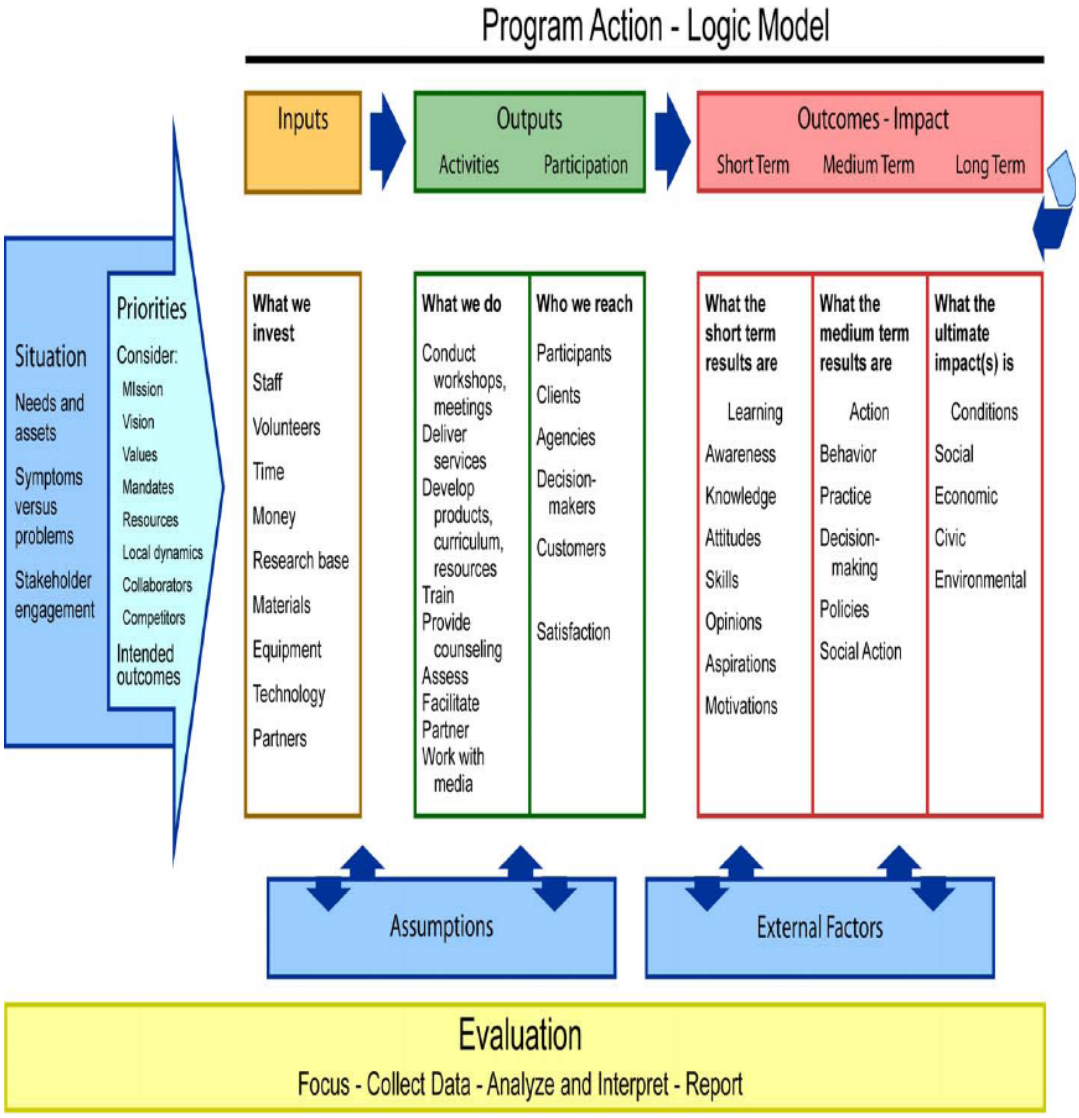

Figure 2.1 Program of Action-Logic Model

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(http://www.uwex.edu/ces/pdande/evaluation/pdf/LMfront.pdf)

Borich Needs Assessment Model

A systematic approach to identifying trainings was developed by Borich in 1980. Borich stated that "institutions engage in training programs to look for ways to determine the effectiveness of training and improvements. The Borich Needs Assessment model was based upon what is and what should be by looking at follow up studies of preservice and in-service education" (p. 39). Also, training need is a discrepancy between the performances relating to the goal of the institution. The Borich Needs Assessment Model combines the importance of the subject and the need for in-service education to determine training needs. The differences between the two can then be used as measure of effectiveness (Barrick, Ladewig, & Hedges, 1983).

The Borich Needs Assessment Model involves two perspectives such as what is and what is supposed to be. The formula of the discrepancy between the two can be calculated and ranked in descending order. The results of the rankings of the goals can be used as a tool to develop or revise existing trainings. The Borich Needs Assessment Model is based on individual judgment and assumptions the respondents make based on their own performance and respond objectively to their current condition. Borich (1980) Needs Assessment Model through self evaluation depends on the formulation of competency statements to be use in the survey.

The study conducted by Barrick et al., (1983) tested the Borich Needs Assessment Model in a program of in-service planning by not only seeking input from program participants on what training they want, but also by incorporating variables such as importance, knowledge, and application. The study concluded that "teachers ranked the 12 in-service topics differently on the basis of importance, knowledge, and application"

(p. 19). By utilizing the weighted and ranked training needs, Borich (1980) determines whether to revise the program or revise the competency. Albright (2000), states that Borich (1980) suggested that the "emphasis of the training program be modified to match high priority competencies because a competency is highly valued but poorly performed, the problem may derive from insufficient rather than ineffective training" (p.41). A Barrick et al., 1983 study provided the methodological framework for this study to determine a process to identify training needs.

Calculating Mean Weighted Discrepancy

There is a two step process to calculate the mean weighted discrepancy score for each of the skills. Step one determines the weighted discrepancy score of each respondent on each needs assessment skill. This process is done by subtracting the competency rating from the importance rating and multiplying the result by the importance rating for that precise skill. Step two calculates the mean weighted discrepancy for each needs assessment skill by dividing the sum of the weighted discrepancy scores of each competency by the number of respondents (Courson, 1999).

This process yields the mean weighted discrepancy.

Discrepancy Score Formula:

$$\frac{\sum [I*(I-C)]}{N}$$

where:

I	=	Importance rating
C	=	Competency rating
N	=	Number of observations

I*(I-C)	=	Weighted Discrepancy Score (WDS)
$\frac{\text{Sum of WDS}}{\text{N}}$	=	Mean Weighted Discrepancy (MWD)

The mean weighted discrepancies for each precise skill are then ranked in descending order to indicate the training need. High rated importance and low rate competence skills will always be ranked higher than skills rated low for importance and high for competence. Therefore, the model provides a quantitative method to determine the deficiency or lack of competence in performing a skill (Courson, 1999).

Summary

The literature cited in this chapter visibly revealed the importance of needs assessment to the Cooperative Extension System. "Needs assessment is a process for pinpointing reasons for gaps in performance or a method for identifying new and future performance needs" (Gupta, 1999, p. 4). Needs assessment is an important community development tool. Needs assessment identify unmet needs in the community, provide evidence of support for policy options, and increase public awareness. The environment is rapidly changing. Future extension leaders must not only know what types of changes are needed, but they must also have the tools and skills to implement change such that resistance decreases and "buy-in" increases with clientele and employees (Washington & Fowler, 2005). The Logic Model is utilized to assist in planning, implementing, evaluating, and communicating more effectively.

A systematic approach to identifying trainings is the Borich Needs Assessment Model. The Borich Needs Assessment Model combines the importance of the subject and the need for in-service education to determine training needs. The SEAL Curriculum is a

resource which can strengthen County Extension Directors knowledge of extension as well as needs assessment.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methods and procedures that were used in this study. The specific objectives of this study were to:

1. Describe County Extension Directors perceptions of importance and competence in needs assessment skills.
2. Describe in-service training needs of County Extension Directors in the area of needs based on the weighted discrepancy model.
3. Describe County Extension Directors perceptions of the benefits of needs assessment.
4. Describe County Extension Directors perceptions of the implementation of needs assessment.
5. Describe County Extension Directors perceptions of their use of needs assessment results.
6. Describe relevance of County Extension Directors demographics among program of focus areas as it pertained to needs assessment.
7. Determine the knowledge and usage of Strengthening Extension Advisory Leaders (SEAL) Curriculum.

The section is organized under the following headings: (a) research design, (b) population and sample, (c) instrumentation, (d) validity, (e) reliability, (f) data collection, and (g) data analysis.

Research Design

This study utilized a descriptive survey research design. As stated by Ary, Jacobs, and Razavieh (2002), "descriptive surveys attempt to measure what exists without questioning why it exists" (as cited by White, 1993, p.118). Descriptive survey involves the description of natural or man–made phenomena and their form, action, and changes over time; and similarities with other phenomena (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007). Gall, et al., (2007) explained that some descriptive studies involved primarily the administration of questionnaires and that this type of research (sometimes called survey research) has yielded much valuable knowledge about opinions, attitudes, and practices. Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) explained descriptive survey research is used to describe an existing condition.

A well-designed survey can be effective in gathering information. A common technique for gathering data for the descriptive survey is the questionnaire. The most popular, less expensive, and less time consuming is the electronic survey. Electronic surveys yield prompt returns, lower item non-response, and more complete answers to open-ended questions, in addition to is the ease of the respondent to navigate through the instrument (Colorado State University Writing Guides, 2007).

Advocates of needs assessment surveys, urges educators to use these surveys as a decision-making tool for identifying the educational activities or programs they should offer to best meet their clients' and society's education needs (Queeney, 1995). These

surveys are used as tools to analyze program feasibility; in essence, they serve as quasi-referendums on potential programs. The premise is that if a survey is conducted properly, survey respondents will participate in program activities (Witkin & Altschuld, 1995; Reviere, Berkowits, Carter, & Ferguson, 1996).

Extension educators regularly conduct needs assessment surveys to develop programs to meet their clients' education needs (Ahmann, 1979; Gilmore, 1989). These surveys are particularly prevalent in continuing education programs, where rapidly expanding knowledge, technical innovations, and public demand for professional competence require specialists to constantly increase their skills and knowledge (Queeney, 1995).

Population and Sampling

The population consisted of the County Extension Directors as of January 1, 2008 ($N = 80$). At the time of the study there were 80, not 82 County Extension Directors. All County Extension Directors and agents with County Extension Directors responsibilities were invited to participate voluntary in this study.

Instrumentation

The instrument was constructed after the literature review. The construction of the instrument was developed from suggestions from mail and Internet surveys, along with *The Tailored Design Method 2007 Update with New Internet, Visual, and Mixed-Mode Guide* by Dillman (2007). Items on the survey were selected and modified based on review of the literature.

The questionnaire used to collect data for this study was modified from two previous studies (permission was granted to use surveys) conducted by Dr. Jennifer Thorn Bentlejewsk (2003), University of Maryland Cooperative Extension (Appendix B), and Dr. Michael H. Schwarz (2005), Virginia Tech (Appendix C).

The instrument was divided into the following sections: (a) conducting needs assessment, (b) benefits of needs assessment, (c) implementing needs assessment, (d) using needs assessment result, (e) demographics, strengthening extension advisory leaders curriculum (SEAL), and (f) comments.

- Section A (conducting needs assessment) consisted of fifteen statements which respondents demonstrated their perception of importance and competence of needs assessment.
- Section B (benefits of needs assessment) consisted of thirteen Likert-type statements which respondents demonstrated the potential benefits of implementing needs assessment.
- Section C (implementing needs assessment) consisted of eight Likert-type statements which respondents demonstrated how they implement needs assessment.
- Section D (using needs assessment result) consisted of eleven Likert-type statements which respondents demonstrated how needs assessment results are utilized.
- Section E (demographics and SEAL Curriculum) consisted of six statements related to gender, programmatic focus area, education level, types of degree and six questions on the SEAL Curriculum.

- Section F consisted of a comment section.

A panel of experts made up of six Mississippi State University Extension Service employees and a retired extension County Director assisted in validating the survey instrument. Following the recommendations from the panel of experts (Appendix D), the survey instrument was edited.

The survey was pilot tested with 10 Alabama Cooperative Extension System County Extension Coordinators. The Alabama Cooperative Extension System County Extension Coordinators (Test and Retest) validated the survey. The instrument (Appendix E), utilized several scales to rate County Extension Directors' perceptions of needs assessment.

Validity

Content–related evidence of test validity is determined systematically by content experts, who defined in precise terms the universe of specific content that the test is assumed to represent, and then determined how well that content universe is sampled by the test items (Gall et al., 2007). The statements in the final survey instrument were validated, reviewed and refined by expert panel and pilot test participants. The final survey consisted of six sections: (a) conducting needs assessment, (b) benefits of needs assessment, (c) implementing needs assessment, (d) using needs assessment result, (e) demographics, strengthening extension advisory leaders curriculum (SEAL), and (f) comments. The Mississippi State University Review Board for Protection of Human Subjects approved the final instrument and the study (Appendix F). Permission was granted by the Extension Director to survey County Extension Directors (Appendix G).

Reliability

Test-retest pilot test of the instrument was conducted. Gall et al., (2007) reported Test-retest is an approach to estimate test reliability in which individuals' scores on a test administered at one point in time are correlated with scores on the same test administered at another point in time, administered to 10 randomly selected County Extension Coordinators from Alabama who have similar programmatic focus as Mississippi County Extension Directors. The pilot test group had the opportunity to address the validity of the instrument and respond to the accuracy, concision, comprehension, and appropriateness of the questions in the survey. The pilot test group utilized a link from Survey Monkey to answer the survey. The first administration of the test-retest was sent May 13, 2008. Of those 10, nine participants responded. The second administration of the instrument was emailed to the same nine respondents on June 27, 2008. Only six participants responded by July 10, 2008 to the second administration of the survey. SPSS 15.0 was used to calculate a Pearson's correlation between each item's test and re-test results. The researcher converted the *r* values to *Fisher's Z* values using a transformation table (Glass & Hopkins, 1996), within each scale, calculated a mean *Z* for the scale. Next, the mean *Z* for each scale was converted back to a Pearson's *r* using the transformation table. This gave an estimate of the overall stability of each scale.

- Section (A) yielded an overall r = .67
- Section (B) yielded an overall r = .52
- Section (C) yielded an overall r = .64
- Section (D) yielded an overall r = .87

The scores in the sections ranged from 0.0 to 1.0. According to Ary, Jacobs, and Razavieh (2002), if results from the measurements are used to make decisions about a

group or for research purposes, reliability coefficients of .50 to .60 are accepted. The instrument was accepted as reliable by the researcher based on the purpose and objectives of this study.

Data Collection

The questionnaire was administered using electronic survey through survey monkey. This study focused on County Extension Directors. Participation letters (Appendix H) were sent out through survey monkey informing the County Extension Directors of the upcoming survey and that their participation was voluntary. The first request was sent to 80 County Extension Directors on August 22, 2008 and 20 responded. A second request was sent to the 60 non-respondents on August 27, 2008 asking them again to participate in the survey. Seven County Extension Directors responded to the request. Following the second request, a third request was sent to the 53 non-respondents on September 1, 2008. Eighteen County Extension Directors responded to the request. A fourth request was sent to the 35 non-respondents on September 7, 2008. Seven County Extension Directors responded. Data collection ended on October 11, 2008 with an 80% response rate. For the 28 non-respondents a hard copy of the survey was mailed September 17, 2008 and 12 County Extension Directors responded by September 25, 2008. Sixteen County Extension Directors did not response to the requests.

A random sample of non-respondents was contacted by phone beginning September 29, 2008 and asked to answer 10 randomly selected questions from the survey. These responses were then compared to the responses of the respondents on the same 10 questions.

An independent samples *t*-test was performed for the question, *Identify appropriate advisory group members, Importance,* to compare the mean from the non-respondents ($M = 4.00$, $SD = .816$) with that of the mean of the respondents *(*$M = 4.20$, $SD = .876$). The alpha level was .10. The test was found to be not statistically significant, $t\ (66) = .451$, $p < .653$.

An independent samples *t*-test was performed for the question, *Identify appropriate advisory group members, Competence,* to compare the mean from the non-respondents ($M = 4.00$, $SD = .816$) with that of the mean of the respondents *(*$M = 4.08$, $SD = .841$). The alpha level was .10. The test was found to be not statistically significant, $t\ (66) = .180$, $p < .857$.

An independent samples *t*-test was performed for the question, *Train advisory groups on observation of local needs, Importance,* to compare the mean from the non-respondents ($M = 3.50$, $SD = 1.000$) with that of the mean of the respondents *(*$M = 4.02$, $SD = 1.046$). The alpha level was .10. The test was found to be not statistically significant, $t\ (66) = .958$, $p < .342$.

An independent samples *t*-test was performed for the question, *Train advisory groups on observation of local needs, Competence,* to compare the mean from the non-respondents ($M = 4.00$, $SD = .000$) with that of the mean of the respondents *(*$M = 3.61$, $SD = 1.002$). The alpha level was .10. The test was found to be not statistically significant, $t\ (66) = -.774$, $p < .442$.

An independent samples *t*-test was performed for the question, *Use a focus group to identify needs, Importance,* to compare the mean from the non-respondents ($M = 4.25$, $SD = .957$) with that of the mean of the respondents *(*$M = 3.98$, $SD = 1.016$). The

alpha level was .10. The test was found to be not statistically significant, t (66) = -.509, p < .613.

An independent samples t-test was performed for the question, *Use a focus group to identify needs, Competence,* to compare the mean from the non-respondents (M = 4.25, SD = .957) with that of the mean of the respondents *(*M = 3.55, SD = 1.140). The alpha level was .10. The test was found to be not statistically significant, t (66) = -1.205, p < .233.

An independent samples t-test was performed for the question, *Needs assessment helps me determine if clientele are developing appropriate knowledge and skills,* to compare the mean from the non-respondents (M = 4.25, SD = .500) with that of the mean of the respondents *(*M = 3.80, SD =.962). The alpha level was .10. The test was found to be not statistically significant, t (66) = -.929, p < .356.

An independent samples t-test was performed for the question, *Needs assessment allows me to interact with Agents and Specialists outside of my program area,* to compare the mean from the non-respondents (M = 4.25, SD = .500) with that of the mean of the respondents *(*M = 3.77, SD = 1.065). The alpha level was .10. The test was found to be not statistically significant, t (66) = -.898, p < .372.

An independent samples t-test was performed for the question, *I do not have time to carry out needs assessment projects,* to compare the mean from the non-respondents (M = 2.25, SD = .500) with that of the mean of the respondents *(*M = 3.64, SD = 1.060). The alpha level was .10. The test was found to be not statistically significant, t (66) =.728, p < .469.

An independent samples *t*-test was performed for the question, *Improve the quality of my county programming,* to compare the mean from the non-respondents (M = 3.75, SD = .500) with that of the mean of the respondents *(*M = 3.06, SD = .710). The alpha level was .10. The test was found to be statistically significant, t (66) = -1.901, $p <$ .062.

Only one out of the ten *t*-tests of the comparison of non-respondents to respondents was found to be statistically significant. Therefore, it was assumed that the CED's that responded were an unbiased sample of the participants and the results were representative of the population (Ary et al., 2002, p. 408).

Data Analysis

The research design in this study was a descriptive survey. Data were analyzed with SPSS 15 (2006). The Borich Needs Assessment Model, 1980 was used to analyze the in-service training needs of County Extension Directors.

The first objective of the study was to describe County Extension Directors perceptions of importance and competence in needs assessment skills. In order to determine these perceptions, County Extension Directors were asked to rate 15 needs assessment skills for importance. A Likert-type scale was used for County Extension Directors to rate the importance of needs assessment skills. The scale range was as follows: 1 = *least important*, 2 = *somewhat important*, 3 = *neutral*, 4 = *important*, and 5 = *most important*. A Likert-type scale was used for County Extension Directors to rate the importance of needs assessment skills. The scale range was as follows: 1 = *least competent,* 2 = *somewhat competent*, 3 = *neutral*, 4 = *competent*, and 5 = *most competent*.

The second objective of the study was to describe in-service needs of County Extension Directors in the area of needs based on a weighted discrepancy model. In order to determine in-service needs of County Extension Directors, the Borich Needs Assessment Model, 1980 was used to rank the importance and competence of needs assessment. The top ten ranked importance and competence of mean weight and discrepancy demonstrate the in-service needs of County Extension Directors. County Extension Directors were asked to rate 15 needs assessment skills for importance and competence. The research objectives were addressed by ranking skills in descending order according to mean weighted discrepancy for each skill for all respondents. The mean were used to determine the priority for in-service training of County Extension Directors based on a weighted discrepancy model. The model used in this study was developed by Borich 1980 (as cited by Courson, 1999).

The Borich Needs Assessment Model calculates the mean weighted discrepancy (MWD) of needs assessment skills. The Borich Needs Assessment Model formula emphasizes the mean weight discrepancy (MWD), which allows the results of the formula to quantitatively correspond to the deficiency or lack of competence in performing a skill considered important by the County Extension Director. The following formula was used to calculate the MWD for each of the 15 skills in the study:

$$\frac{\sum [I*(I-C)]}{N}$$

where:

I = Importance rating

C = Competency rating

N	=	Number of observations
I*(I-C)	=	Weighted Discrepancy Score (WDS)
$\frac{\text{Sum of WDS}}{\text{N}}$	=	Mean Weighted Discrepancy (MWD)

The third objective in the study was to describe County Extension Directors perceptions of the benefits of needs assessment. In order to describe perceptions of benefits of needs assessment, County Extension Directors were asked to rate the perceptions of 13 statements. A Likert-type scale was used for County Extension Directors to rate the importance of needs assessment skills. The scale range was as follows: 1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *neutral*, 4 = *agree*, and 5 = *strongly agree*.

The fourth objective in the study was to describe County Extension Directors perceptions of the implementation of needs assessment. In order to describe perceptions of the implementation of needs assessment, County Extension Directors were asked to rate their perceptions on 8 statements. A Likert-type scale was used for County Extension Directors to rate their perceptions of implementations of needs assessment skills. The scale range was as follows: 1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *neutral*, 4 = *agree*, and 5 = *strongly agree*.

The fifth objective in the study was to describe County Extension Directors perceptions of their use of needs assessment results. In order to describe perceptions of their use of needs assessment results, County Extension Directors were asked to rate 11 statements. A Likert-type scale was used for County Extension Directors to rate their perceptions of needs assessment skills. The scale range was as follows: 1 = *never*, 2 = *sometime*, 3 = *often*, and 4 = *always*.

The sixth objective of this study was to describe relevance of County Extension Directors demographics among program of focus among as it pertained to needs assessment. The demographic of program of focus among County Extension Directors consisted of four programmatic focus areas; Agriculture & Natural Resources (ANR), Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS), 4-H Youth (4-H), and Generalist(GEN).

The seventh objective in the study was to determine the knowledge and usage of the Strengthening Extension Advisory Leaders Curriculum. In order to determine the knowledge and usage of the Strengthening Extension Advisory Leaders Curriculum, County Extension Directors were asked to answer six questions.

Short answer questions were used for County Extension Directors to expound on the Extension Advisory Leaders Curriculum. The following (yes or no) questions were asked: *Have you participated in the Strengthen Extension Advisory Leaders (SEAL) Training*; *If no, would you like to participate in a training; If yes, continue to answer the questions below; Have you used the Curriculum; Do you need additional training on SEAL Curriculum; and Do you need additional copies of the SEAL Curriculum*. County Extension Directors were asked one Likert-type question: *How useful did you find the SEAL Curriculum*. The scale range was as follows: 1 = *not useful at all*, 2 = *somewhat useful*, 3 = *very useful,* and 4 = *extremely useful*.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This chapter presents the description, data analyses and findings of the study. The organization of this chapter has been arranged from the objectives of the study. These objectives were to:

- Describe County Extension Directors perceptions of importance and competence in needs assessment skills.
- Describe in-service needs of County Extension Directors in the area of needs based on a weighted discrepancy model.
- Describe County Extension Directors perceptions of the benefits of needs assessment.
- Describe County Extension Directors perceptions of the implementation of needs assessment.
- Describe County Extension Directors perceptions of their use of needs assessment results.
- Describe relevance of County Extension Directors demographics among program of focus among areas as it pertained to needs assessment.
- Determine the knowledge and usage of Strengthening Extension Advisory Leaders (SEAL) Curriculum.

Characteristics of Respondents

The characteristics of the respondents regarding program area, gender, and education level are as follows: a total of 64 County Extension Directors participated in this study. Thirty-eight of the respondents were in Agriculture & Natural Resources, 12 in Family and Consumer Sciences, 4 4-H Youth, and 10 Generalist. Of the 64 County Extension Directors responding to the survey, 61% were male and 39% were female. Eight percent of the respondents had completed a bachelor' degree, 11% completed a bachelor's degree plus graduate work towards masters, 60% completed a master's degree, 14% master's degree plus graduate work towards doctorate, and 6% completed a doctorate degree.

County Extension Directors perceptions of needs assessment

The first objective in the study was to describe County Extension Directors perceptions of importance and competence in needs assessment skills. In order to describe these perceptions, County Extension Directors were asked to rate 15 needs assessment skills for importance and competence. A Likert-type scale was used for County Extension Directors to rate the importance of needs assessment skills. The scale range was as follows: 1 = *least important*, 2 = *somewhat important*, 3 = *neutral*, 4 = *important*, and 5 = *most important*.

Using this scale, the higher the means reported, the more important the specific need was to the County Extension Directors. County Extension Directors rated *identifying appropriate advisory group members* as the most important need (M = 4.20), and *setting needs based priorities for programming* (M = 4.14) as second. *Constructing an on-line survey and using a case study to identify need* were rated least important by

the overall group with means of 3.03 and 3.25, respectively. Table 4.1 provides a listing of the means in descending order according to the importance of needs assessment from County Extension Directors. Three needs assessment skills had a mean over 4.00, therefore, County Extension Directors considered these skills to be very important in performing their responsibilities. The remainder of the needs assessment skills was rated as important to County Extension Directors.

The second component in the first objective was to describe County Extension Directors perceptions of competency in needs assessment. To describe the perceived competency level, County Extension Directors were asked to rate their ability to perform 15 need assessment skills. The findings related to the rating for perceived competency level are reported in this section. A Likert-type scale was used for County Extension Directors to rate the competence of needs assessment skills. The scale range was as follows: 1 = *least competent*, 2 = *somewhat competent*, 3 = *neutral*, 4 = *competent*, and 5 = *most competent*.

County Extension Directors reported being most competent in *identifying appropriate advisory groups members (M* = 4.08). County Extension Directors reported being the least competent in *analyzing survey data* (*M* = 2.98), *interpreting statistical data* (*M* = 2.84), *identifying sources of statistical data* (*M* = 2.81), and *entering survey into spreadsheets* (*M* = 2.78). Ten competencies had means between 3.0, neutral, and 4.0, competent. County Extension Directors reported means below 3.0 on four competencies*: analyzing survey data, interpreting statistical data, identifying sources of statistical data, and entering survey data into spreadsheets,* as shown in Table 4.2.

In-service Needs Based on a Weighted Discrepancy Model

The second objective in this study was to describe in-service needs of County Extension Directors in the area of needs based on a weighted discrepancy model. The model used in this study was developed by Borich in 1980. The Borich Model formula emphasizes mean weight discrepancy (MWD), which allows the results of the formula to quantitatively correspond to the deficiency or lack of competence in performing a skill considered important by County Extension Directors.

The following formula was used to calculate the MWD for each of the 15 skills in the study:

$$\frac{\sum[I*(I-C)]}{N}$$

where:

I	=	Importance rating
C	=	Competency rating
N	=	Number of observations
I*(I-C)	=	Weighted Discrepancy Score (WDS)
$\frac{\text{Sum of WDS}}{N}$	=	Mean Weighted Discrepancy (MWD)

Using this formula, the WDS could range from +20 to -6 based on the rating scales used in the survey. Theoretically, there could be negative MWDs utilizing the formula, however, there were no MWDs below zero in the study. Based on the Borich (1980) discrepancy model, training priority is given to skills with the highest mean weighted discrepancy (as cited by Courson, 1999).

Table 4. 3 contains the rank order of skills based on the mean weighted discrepancy calculated using importance ratings and competence ratings from County Extension Directors. The MWD's ranged from 0.80-3.45. *Entering survey data into spreadsheets*, had the highest MWD (M = 3.45), while *identifying appropriate advisory group members*, had the lowest MWD (M = 0.80). Skills with higher MWD's are an indication that County Extension Directors perceive them to be important to their work but lack the competence to perform those skills. Skills with lower MWD's is confirmation that County Extension Directors rated those skills high for importance and had a relative high competency level, or County Extension Directors rated those skills low for importance and rated their ability to perform those skills as either low or high.

Table 4.4 illustrates the top 10 MWD's of the needs assessment skills according to the rank for importance and competence from all respondents. The data reveals the principle of the discrepancy model, which places additional weight on the importance of skills.

Perceptions of the Benefits of Needs Assessment

The third objective in the study was to describe County Extension Directors perceptions of the benefits of needs assessment. In order to describe the perceptions of benefits of needs assessment, County Extension Directors were asked to rate the perceptions of 13 statements. A Likert-type scale was used for County Extension Directors to rate the importance of needs assessment skills. The scale range was as follows: 1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *neutral*, 4 = *agree*, and 5 = *strongly agree*. County Extension Directors strongly agree that *needs assessment enables them to identify necessary changes for future programs* (M = 4.20). County Extension Directors

agree least(M = 3.30) that *needs assessment work leads to opportunities to present posters, speak at conferences, or publish articles* and *needs assessment expands funding opportunities* as shown in Table 4.5.

Perceptions of the Implementation of Needs Assessment

The fourth objective in the study was to describe County Extension Directors perceptions of the implementation of needs assessment. To describe perceptions of the implementation of needs assessment, County Extension Directors were asked to rate their perceptions on eight statements. A Likert-type scale was used for County Extension Directors to rate their perceptions of implementations of needs assessment skills. The scale range was as follows: 1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *neutral*, 4 = *agree*, and 5 = *strongly agree*. County Extension Directors agree overall that they *use needs assessment for external audiences and program improvement* (M = 3.77). County Extension Directors rated overall that they *do not lack an understanding of effective needs assessment practices* (M = 2.25), as shown in Table 4.6.

Perceptions of Using Needs Assessment Results

The fifth objective in the study was to describe County Extension Directors perceptions of their use of needs assessment results. In order to describe perceptions of their use of needs assessment results, County Extension Directors were asked to rate 11 statements. A Likert-type scale was used for County Extension Directors to rate their perceptions of needs assessment skills. The scale range was: 1 = *Never*, 2 = *Sometimes*, 3 = *Often,* and 4 = *Always*. County Extension Directors agree overall that they *often use needs assessment to make decisions about planning* (M = 3.38). County Extension

Directors rated that they sometimes *use needs assessment to secure funding from stakeholders* (*M* = 2.34)*,* as shown in Table 4.7.

Describe the relevance of demographics among County Extension Directors

The sixth objective of this study was to describe the relevance of demographics in program of focus among as it pertained to needs assessment. The demographic of program of focus among County Extension Directors consisted of four programmatic focus areas; Agriculture & Natural Resources (ANR), Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS), 4-H Youth (4-H), and Generalist(GEN).

According to the MSU-ES Restructuring Plan, 2002, County Extension Directors are to:

> organize, maintain, and consult with the county extension executive board, appropriate local program advisory groups, community leaders, public officials, and representatives of intended audiences to analyze data, identify needs, assist in developing educational programs, identify and organize information regarding clientele needs for all program areas in the county (except 4-H Youth if the County has a 4-H Youth Agent), and assess the relevance, significance, and timeliness of identified needs (p. 27).

Some 4-H Youth Agents have County Extension Director duties. There are numerous other responsibilities of County Extension Directors mentioned in the MSU-ES Restructuring Plan, 2002. Tables 4.8 through 4.12 demonstrate needs assessment findings in program of focus areas.

For the importance of needs assessment within program of focus area, ANR Agents rated *constructing an on-line survey* below 3.00 (*M* =2.79). All other means were above 3.00. Other programs of focus had means of 3.00 - 4.50, which imply County Extension Directors perceives needs assessment as important or most important as shown in Table 4.8, to Mississippi State University Extension Service.

The competence of needs assessment within program of focus areas are noted in Table 4.9. For the competence of needs assessment, ANR County Extension Directors perceived 8 of 15 skills with means below 3.00. ANR County Extension Directors rated the following skills with means below 3.00: *construct a mail survey* (*M* = 2.97), *construct an on-line survey* (*M* = 2.34), *enter survey data into spreadsheets* (*M* = 2.61), *analyze survey data* (*M* = 2.82), *identify sources of statistical data* (*M* = 2.74), *access statistical data via the internet* (*M* = 2.84), *interpret statistical data* (*M* = 2.71), and *use case study to identify needs* (*M* = 2.95).

Family and Consumer Sciences County Extension Directors perceived 5 of 15 skills with means below 3.00. The following skills were rated below 3.00: *construct an on-line* (*M* = 2.42), *enter survey data into spreadsheet* (*M* = 2.92), *identify sources of statistical data* (*M* = 2.75), *access statistical data via the internet* (*M* = 2.75), and *interpret statistical data* (*M* = 2.67).

4-H County Extension Directors rated 5 of 15 skills with means below 3.00.They were as follows: *construct an on-line survey* (*M* = 2.50), *enter survey data into spreadsheet* (*M* = 2.25), *identify sources of statistical data* (*M* = 2.75), *interpret statistical data* (*M* = 2.75), and *establish a benchmark for a need* (*M* = 2.75).

Generalist County Extension Directors rated 1 of 15 skills below 3.00: *construct an on-line survey (M* = 2.40).

The benefits of needs assessment of the County Extension Directors within the program of focus areas rated 13 of 13 skills above 3.00. This indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed that there are benefits of needs assessment results to MSU-ES. The means ranged from 3.03 - 4.50, as shown in Table 4.10.

For the implementing of needs assessment within the program of focus areas, ANR County Extension Directors reported that *they felt they were not rewarded for their needs assessment efforts* (*M* = 3.29). FCS County Extension Directors reported that they *lack extensive training in needs assessment techniques* (*M* = 3.00), were *not rewarded for their needs assessment efforts* (*M* = 3.08), and *felt support for implementing needs assessment is lacking from administration (M* = 3.58). Generalist County Extension Directors reported that *they lack extensive training in needs assessment techniques* (*M* = 3.00), *do not have time to carry out needs assessment projects* (*M* = 3.10), and *felt support for implementing needs assessment is lacking from administration* (*M* = 3.00). All program of focus areas felt that they *have needs assessment resources such as training manuals and/or web resources, don't lack an understanding of effective needs assessment practices, don't think that needs assessment is too complex, and use needs assessment for external audiences and program improvement,* as shown in Table 4.11.

The means for using needs assessment results are shown in Table 4.12 by program of focus areas. ANR County Extension Directors rated 9 of the 11 skills with means below 3.00: *improve the quality of my county programming* (*M* = 2.95), *improve my instructions* (*M* = 2.74), *improve clientele well-being* (*M* = 2.84), *report progress on annual reports* (*M* = 2.89), *secure funding from stakeholders* (*M* = 2.29), *meet statewide mandate* (*M* = 2.71), *gain recognition for quality programs* (*M* = 2.47*), market programs to potential clientele* (*M* = 2.76), and *verify that the needs assessment process itself has supplied the necessary information* (*M* = 2.71).

FCS County Extension Directors rated 5 of 11 skills means below 3.00: *secure funding from stakeholders* (*M* = 2.25), *meet statewide mandate* (*M* = 2.75), *gain*

recognition for quality programs (*M* = 2.42), *market programs to potential clientele* (*M* = 2.92), and *verify that the needs assessment process itself has supplied the necessary information* (*M* = 2.75).

4-H County Extension Directors rated 6 of 11 skills with means below 3.00: *improve my instructions* (*M* = 2.75), *improve clientele well-being* (*M* = 2.50), *meet statewide mandate* (*M* = 2.50), *gain recognition for quality programs* (*M* = 2.25), *market programs to potential clientele* (*M* = 2.75), and *verify that the needs assessment process itself has supplied the necessary information* (*M* = 2.75).

Generalist County Extension Directors rated 6 of the 11 skills with means below 3.00: *improve my instructions* (*M* = 2.90), *improve clientele well-being* (*M* = 2.70), *secure funding from stakeholders* (*M*= 2.40), *meet statewide mandate* (*M* = 2.80), *gain recognition for quality programs* (*M* = 2.50), and *market programs to potential clientele* (*M* = 2.90).

Strengthening Extension Advisory Leaders Curriculum

The seventh objective in the study was to determine the knowledge and usage of the SEAL Curriculum. In order to determine the knowledge and usage of the SEAL Curriculum, County Extension Directors were asked to answer six questions. A total of 63 County Extension Directors responded to the question, *Have you participated in the SEAL Training*? Twenty-two County Extension Directors responded that they had participated in the SEAL Training, and 41 reported they did not participate in the training. One County Extension Director did not respond to the question.

A total of 42 County Extension Directors responded to the question, *Would you like to participate in SEAL Training*? Twenty-two said yes they would like to participate

in SEAL Training, and 20 would not like to participate in the training. Twenty-two did not respond to the question.

A total of 22 County Extension Directors responded to the question, *Have you used SEAL Curriculum with advisory committees*? Eighteen reported that they have used the SEAL Curriculum, 4 reported they have not used the SEAL Curriculum and 42 did not respond to the question.

A total of 18 County Extension Directors responded to the question of *How useful did you find the SEAL Curriculum*? One said it was not useful at all, 10 said it was somewhat useful, 5 reported it was very useful, and 2 said it was extremely useful and 42 did not respond to the question, *Do you need additional training on the SEAL Curriculum*? Eight reported they needed additional training on the SEAL Curriculum. *Do you need additional copies of the SEAL Curriculum*? Ten reported they did not need additional copies of the SEAL Curriculum.

Table 4.1

Needs Assessment by Importance

Questions	N	M	SD
Identify appropriate advisory group members.	64	4.20	.88
Set needs-based priorities for programming.	64	4.14	1.08
Train advisory groups on observation of local needs.	64	4.02	1.05
Use a focus group to identify needs.	64	3.98	1.01
Develop an action plan to improve a need.	64	3.97	1.05
Establish a benchmark for a need.	64	3.64	.98
Write survey questions.	64	3.63	.98
Analyze survey data.	64	3.63	.98
Interpret statistical data.	64	3.53	1.10
Enter survey data into spreadsheets.	64	3.52	1.13
Identify sources of statistical data.	64	3.50	1.11
Access statistical data via the Internet.	64	3.45	1.05
Construct a mail survey.	64	3.38	1.12
Use a case study to identify needs.	64	3.25	1.23
Construct an on-line survey.	64	3.03	1.08

Note: Overall mean = 3.66

Table 4.2

Needs Assessment by Competence

Questions	N	M	SD
Identify appropriate advisory group members.	64	4.08	.84
Set needs-based priorities for programming.	64	3.75	1.05
Train advisory groups on observation of local needs.	64	3.61	1.00
Develop an action plan to improve a need.	64	3.59	1.08
Use a focus group to identify needs.	64	3.55	1.14
Write survey questions.	64	3.41	.92
Establish a benchmark for a need.	64	3.22	.97
Construct a mail survey.	64	3.20	1.06
Construct an on-line survey.	64	3.20	1.05
Use a case study to identify needs.	64	3.17	1.09
Access statistical data via the Internet.	64	3.00	1.08
Analyze survey data.	64	2.98	1.11
Interpret statistical data.	64	2.84	1.06
Identify sources of statistical data.	64	2.81	1.07
Enter survey data into spreadsheets.	64	2.78	1.24

Note: Overall mean = 3.28

Table 4.3

In-service Needs of County Extension Directors Based on MWD

Questions	N	MWD
Enter survey data into spreadsheets.	64	3.45
Interpret statistical data.	64	3.08
Identify sources of statistical data.	64	3.08
Analyze survey data.	64	3.00
Construct an on-line survey.	64	2.86
Establish a benchmark for a need.	64	2.48
Train advisory groups on observation of local needs.	64	2.28
Use a focus group to identify needs.	64	2.27
Access statistical data via the Internet.	64	2.17
Set needs-based priorities for programming.	64	2.03
Develop an action plan to improve a need.	64	1.94
Construct a mail survey.	64	1.27
Write survey questions.	64	1.25
Use a case study to identify needs.	64	1.24
Identify appropriate advisory group members.	64	0.80

Table 4.4

Importance and Competence of Need Assessment by MWD

Needs Assessment Skills	Rank	MWD	Importance Rank	Competency Rank
Enter survey data into spreadsheets.	1	3.45	10	15
Interpret statistical data.	2	3.08	9	13
Identify sources of statistical data.	3	3.08	11	14
Analyze survey data.	4	3.00	8	12
Construct an on-line survey.	5	2.86	15	8
Establish a benchmark for a need.	6	2.48	6	7
Train advisory groups on observation of local needs.	7	2.28	3	3
Use a focus group to identify needs.	8	2.27	4	5
Access statistical data via the Internet.	9	2.17	12	11
Set needs-based priorities for programming.	10	2.03	2	2

Note: Order from highest to lowest

Table 4.5

Benefits of Needs Assessment

Questions	N	M	SD
Needs assessment enables me to identify necessary changes for future programs.	64	4.20	.82
Needs assessment increases my capacity to understand the diverse needs of my clientele.	64	4.13	.75
Needs assessment provides critical information for strategic and program planning.	64	4.05	.88
Needs assessment allows me to determine if my curriculum is contributing to clientele learning.	64	3.92	.95
Needs assessment allows me to interact with Area Agents and Specialists in my program area.	64	3.92	1.03
Needs assessment efforts produce vital information to improve teaching.	64	3.83	1.02
Needs assessment helps me determine if clientele are developing appropriate knowledge and skills.	64	3.80	.96
Needs Assessment allow me to interact with Area Agents and Specialists outside of my program area.	64	3.77	1.07
Needs assessment demonstrates learner improvements which I use for my quarterly report.	64	3.58	1.02
Needs Assessment help me inform the clientele about my expectations.	64	3.53	1.07
My needs assessment efforts are valued in the promotion and tenure process.	64	3.38	1.03
My needs assessment work leads to opportunities to present posters, speak at conferences, or publish articles.	64	3.30	1.02
Needs assessment expands my funding opportunities.	64	3.30	1.01

Note: 1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 2 = *Disagree*, 3 = *Neutral*, 4 = *Agree*, and 5 = *Strongly Agree*

Table 4.6

Implementation of Needs Assessment

Questions	N	M	SD
I use needs assessment for external audiences and program improvement.	64	3.77	.79
I am not rewarded for my needs assessment efforts.	64	3.14	.97
I feel that support for implementing needs assessment is lacking support from administration.	64	2.89	1.03
I do not have time to carry out needs assessment projects.	64	2.64	1.06
I lack extensive training in needs assessment techniques.	64	2.61	1.14
I don't have needs assessment resources such as training manuals and/or web resources.	64	2.53	.98
I think that needs assessment is too complex and difficult to implement.	64	2.31	.97
I lack an understanding of effective needs assessment practices.	64	2.25	.85

Note: 1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 2 = *Disagree*, 3 = *Neutral*, 4 = *Agree*, and 5 = *Strongly Agree*

Table 4.7

Using Needs Assessment Results

Questions	N	M	SD
Make decisions about planning.	64	3.38	.63
Be accountable to stakeholders.	64	3.09	.68
Improve the quality of my county programming.	64	3.06	.71
Report progress on annual reports.	64	2.98	.77
Improve clientele well being.	64	2.89	.76
Improve my instructions.	64	2.86	.73
Market programs to potential clientele.	64	2.81	.81
Verify that the needs assessment process itself has supplied the necessary information.	64	2.78	.83
Meet statewide mandates.	64	2.72	.86
Gain recognition for quality programs.	64	2.45	.89
Secure funding from stakeholders.	64	2.34	.91

Note: Scale: 1 = *Never*, 2 = *Sometimes*, 3 = *Often*, and 4 = *Always*.

Table 4.8

Importance Within Program Area of Focus

Questions	ANR		FCS		4-H		GEN	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Construct a mail survey.	3.05	1.18	3.92	.90	4.00	.82	3.70	.82
Construct a on-line survey.	2.79	1.09	3.25	1.05	3.25	.96	3.60	.97
Write survey questions.	3.34	.99	4.25	.62	4.00	.82	3.80	1.03
Enter survey data into spreadsheets.	3.26	1.18	4.00	.85	3.75	.96	3.80	1.03
Analyze survey data.	3.39	1.20	4.00	.74	4.25	.50	3.80	1.03
Identify sources of statistical data.	3.18	1.14	4.08	.67	4.25	.50	3.70	.82
Access statistical data via the Internet.	3.13	1.14	3.92	.90	4.25	.50	3.80	.92
Interpret statistical data.	3.26	1.16	4.00	.74	4.25	.50	3.70	1.06
Set needs based priorities for programming.	4.11	.89	4.25	.75	4.50	.58	4.00	1.05
Identify appropriate advisory group members.	4.16	.89	4.42	.67	4.50	.58	4.00	1.15
Train advisory groups on observation of local needs.	3.79	1.14	4.50	.52	4.50	.58	4.10	1.01
Use a case study to identify needs.	3.00	1.30	3.83	.94	3.25	.96	3.50	1.27
Establish a benchmark for a need.	3.45	.98	4.08	.67	4.00	.82	3.70	1.25
Develop an action plan to improve a need.	3.76	1.15	4.50	.52	4.50	.58	3.90	1.10

Table 4.9

Competence Within Program Area of Focus

Questions	ANR		FCS		4-H		GEN	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Construct a mail survey.	2.97	1.10	3.58	.79	3.50	1.30	3.50	.97
Construct a on-line survey.	2.34	1.12	2.42	1.00	2.50	1.29	2.40	1.27
Write survey questions.	3.32	.93	3.75	.62	3.25	1.50	3.40	.97
Enter survey data into spreadsheets.	2.61	1.37	2.92	1.08	2.25	.50	3.50	.85
Analyze survey data.	2.82	1.16	3.08	1.00	3.25	1.50	3.40	.84
Identify sources of statistical data.	2.74	1.20	2.75	.97	2.75	.50	3.20	.79
Access statistical data via the internet.	2.84	1.13	2.75	.97	3.00	.82	3.90	.97
Interpret statistical data.	2.71	1.14	2.67	.78	2.75	.50	3.60	.97
Set needs based priorities for programming.	3.82	1.11	3.50	1.24	4.00	.82	3.70	.68
Identify appropriate advisory group members.	4.11	.83	4.00	.74	4.25	.96	4.00	1.05
Train advisory groups on observation of local needs.	3.58	1.03	3.58	.90	3.75	.96	3.70	1.16
Use a focus group to identify needs.	3.47	1.22	3.67	.99	4.00	1.16	3.50	1.08
Use a case study to identify needs.	2.95	1.11	3.50	.91	3.25	.50	3.60	1.27
Establish a benchmark for a need.	3.26	1.01	3.17	1.03	2.75	.50	3.30	.95
Develop an action plan to improve a need.	3.53	1.08	4.00	.95	3.50	1.00	3.40	1.27

Table 4.10

Benefits Within Program Area of Focus

Questions	ANR		FCS		4-H		GEN	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Needs assessment helps me determine if clientele are developing appropriate knowledge and skills.	3.76	1.00	4.17	.84	3.75	1.26	3.50	.85
Needs assessment allow me to determine if my curriculum is contributing to clientele learning.	3.92	.82	4.25	.97	3.75	1.26	3.60	1.17
Needs assessment efforts produce vital information to improve teaching.	3.71	1.04	4.08	.79	4.25	.50	3.80	1.02
Needs assessment enables me to identify necessary changes for future programs.	4.16	.72	4.42	.52	4.50	.58	4.00	1.41
Needs assessment helps me inform the clientele about my expectations.	3.50	1.03	3.92	1.00	3.75	1.26	3.10	1.20
Needs assessment allows me to interact Area Agents and Specialist in my program area.	3.68	1.14	4.42	.52	4.00	.82	4.20	.92
Needs assessment allows me to interact Area Agents, and Specialist outside my program area.	3.47	1.18	4.33	.49	4.00	.82	4.10	.88
Needs assessment efforts are valued in the promotion and tenure process.	3.11	1.03	3.75	.75	4.00	.82	3.70	1.16

Table 4.10 continued

Questions	ANR		FCS		4-H		GEN	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Needs assessment demonstrates learner improvements which I use for my quarterly report.	3.39	1.05	4.17	.84	4.00	.82	3.40	.97
Needs assessment work leads to opportunities to present posters, speak at conferences, or publish articles.	3.05	1.01	3.67	.89	4.00	.82	3.50	1.08
Needs assessment expands my funding opportunities.	3.03	1.08	3.75	.87	4.50	.58	3.30	1.25
Needs assessment increase my capacity to understand the clientele.	4.05	.70	4.33	.49	4.50	.58	4.00	1.16
Needs assessment provides critical information for strategic and program planning.	3.92	.82	4.50	.52	4.50	.58	3.80	1.33

Table 4.11

Implementation of Needs Assessment Within Program Area of Focus

Questions	ANR		FCS		4-H		GEN.	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
I lack extensive training in needs assessment techniques.	2.42	1.13	3.00	.95	2.25	1.26	3.00	2.61
I don't have needs assessment resources such as training manuals and/or web resources.	2.58	.92	2.50	.80	1.75	.50	2.70	1.42
I lack an understanding of effective.	2.29	.96	2.17	.39	2.00	.82	2.30	.95
I am not rewarded for my needs assessment.	3.29	1.01	3.08	.79	2.50	.58	2.90	1.10
I think that needs assessment is too complex and difficult to implement.	2.39	1.00	2.00	.43	2.25	1.26	2.40	1.27
I do not have time to carry out needs assessment projects.	2.61	1.05	2.33	.65	2.75	.96	3.10	1.45
I feel that support for implementing needs assessment is lacking from administration.	2.74	.98	3.58	.79	2.00	.82	3.00	1.15
I use needs assessment for external audiences and program improvement.	3.76	.85	3.75	.75	4.00	.00	3.70	.79

Table 4.12

Using Needs Assessment Results Within Program Area of Focus

Questions	ANR		FCS		4-H		GEN	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Improve the quality of my county programming.	2.95	.73	3.42	.52	3.00	.00	3.10	.88
Improve my instructions.	2.74	.72	3.25	.62	2.75	.50	2.90	.88
Improve clientele well-being.	2.84	.75	3.33	.65	2.50	.57	2.70	.82
Make decisions about planning.	3.34	.63	3.58	.52	3.50	.58	3.20	.80
Report progress on annual reports.	2.89	.79	3.08	.66	3.50	.58	3.00	.82
Secure funding from stakeholders.	2.29	.89	2.25	.62	3.00	.81	2.40	1.26
Meet statewide mandate.	2.71	.83	2.75	.86	2.50	1.00	2.80	1.03
Gain recognition for quality programs.	2.47	.92	2.42	.79	2.25	.50	2.50	1.08
Market programs to potential clientele.	2.76	.88	2.92	.79	2.75	.50	2.90	.73
Be accountable to stakeholders.	3.00	.69	3.17	.71	3.25	.50	3.30	.67
Verify that the needs assessment process itself has supplied the necessary information.	2.71	.83	2.75	.86	2.75	.50	3.10	.87

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This chapter is structured in four sections. The first section is the summary of the study. The second is the conclusions, the third is recommendations from the findings and fourth, suggestions for additional research on the subject.

Summary

Assessing needs contributes to Mississippi State University Extension Service mission and goals. The following are some of the goals of MSU-ES: (1) focus on quality services and programs that are client-driven, (2) be responsive to new or different needs by maintaining flexibility in programming efforts, (3) develop a level of alternative resources to allow for adjustments to changing demands or critical needs, (4) expand efforts to help clients compete in a global economy, and (5) needs assessment facilitates in accomplishing these goals (msucares.com).

The purpose of the study was to address in-service training needs of Mississippi County Extension Directors in the area of program needs assessment. To address in-service training needs, the following objectives were used for this study:

1. Describe County Extension Directors perceptions of importance and competence in needs assessment skills. Describe in-service needs of County Extension Directors in the area of needs based on a weighted discrepancy model.
2. Describe County Extension Directors perceptions of the benefits of needs assessment.
3. Describe County Extension Directors perceptions of the implementation of needs assessment.
4. Describe County Extension Directors perceptions of their use of needs assessment results.
5. Describe relevance of County Extension Directors demographics among program of focus areas as it pertained to needs assessment.
6. Determine the knowledge and usage of Strengthening Extension Advisory Leaders (SEAL) Curriculum.

The rationale behind the study was that with the rapid changes within Mississippi State University Extension Service, county structural make up may contribute to training opportunities for County Extension Directors in the area of needs assessment. Training is an excellent opportunity and a necessity to keep County Extension Staff current in today's society.

This study utilized a descriptive survey research design that explains the existing perceptions of needs assessment of County Extension Directors. An electronic survey was used to gather data for the study. The instrument was divided into the following sections: (a) conducting needs assessment, (b) benefits of implementing needs

assessment,(c) implementing needs assessment,(d) using need assessment results,(e) demographics, and (f) Strengthening Extension Advisory Leaders Curriculum.

The population consisted of the 80 County Extension Directors; two positions were vacant. All County Extension Directors were sent a survey and their participation was voluntary. Eighty percent (64) of the County Extension Directors filled out the survey.

Responses were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 15). Data were analyzed by SPSS 15 (2006).The following analyses used included frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations. In addition, the Borich model was used to analyze the in-service training needs of County Extension Directors.

Conclusions

This section presents the conclusions based on the objectives of this study. The findings correlated to County Extension Directors only.

Objective 1 - Describe County Extension Directors perceptions of importance and competence in needs assessment skills.

County Extension Directors rated the 15 skills either most important or important. County Extension Directors perceived that needs assessment skills are important to their jobs as well as to MSU-ES. The County Extension Directors reported they were not competent in the following skills: *analyzing survey data, interpreting statistical data, identifying sources of statistical data, and entering survey data into spreadsheets*.

Training is needed to help alleviate the deficiencies. The skills noted are those which are in the initial stage in the Logic Model, which involves analyzing needs and assets, problem diagnosis and examining relevant research, knowledge and experience.

Also, training provided to County Extension Directors on the Logic Model will help improve their competency as well as demonstrate the administration's desire to have more competent employees, as well as teach conceptual tools for planning, which the Logic Model displays.

Objective 2 - Describe in-service needs of County Extension Directors in the area of needs assessment based on a weighted discrepancy model.

The Borich Needs Assessment Model confirmed that in-service training on needs assessment is effective and important. Training on the following should be conducted:

- *Analyzing survey data*
- *Interpreting statistical data*
- *Identifying sources of statistical data*
- *Entering survey data into spreadsheets*

Objective 3- Describe the County Extension Directors perceptions of the benefits of needs assessment.

Overall, County Extension Directors believe that they acquire benefits from needs assessment. County Extension Directors rated theses statements neutral:

- *Needs assessment efforts are valued in the promotion and tenure process.*
- *Needs assessment work leads to opportunities to present posters, speak at conferences, or publish articles.*
- *Needs assessment expands my opportunities.*
- *Needs assessment helps me inform the clientele about my expectations*.

Witkin and Altschuld (1995), stated that resource allocation is an important part of organizational and community planning. They also make it known that a major

function of policymakers and management is to decide where to put the organizations' resources, what programs or services to add, what to maintain, and what to cut back or delete.

County Extension Directors need to be made aware of the funding opportunities and the impact needs assessment have on funding. Providing training on the SEAL Curriculum, Logic Model and Needs Assessment to County Extension Directors could change the perceptions of the benefits of needs assessment.

Objective 4 - Describe County Extension Directors perceptions of the implementation of needs assessment.

County Extension Directors illustrated a positive perception in their ability to implement needs assessment. They disagreed with the most negative statements, demonstrating that they have the proper tools to effectively implement needs assessment. The two following statements were rated high: *I am not rewarded for my needs assessment efforts* ($M = 3.14$), and that *support for implementing needs assessment is lacking support from administration* ($M = 2.89$). Administrators should look at the personnel evaluation instrument to evaluate the means of supporting County Extension Directors to change their perceptions. The result of County Extension Directors responses to their ability to implementing of needs assessment has indications that training is essential. Seevers et al., 1997, states that after identifying community needs, implementation is the next phase in the process. This process is very important, it is essential that County Extension Directors understand how to implement needs assessment. This situation can be alleviated by providing in-service to County Extension Directors on needs assessment.

Objective 5-Describe the County Extension Directors perceptions of their use of needs assessment results.

County Extension Directors rated the following skills between 2.98-2.34:

- *reporting progress on annual reports*
- *improving clientele well being*
- *improving my instructions*
- *marketing programs to potential clientele*
- *verifying that their needs assessment process itself has supplied the necessary information*
- *meeting statewide mandates*
- *gain recognition for quality programs*
- *securing funding from stakeholders*

This reiterates that County Extension Directors need training on the importance of needs assessment to Mississippi State University Extension Service. Needs assessment is a critical element of effective extension programming and one of the key components of extension work. Information gathered from evaluations is critical for documenting program impact, making changes for future programs, and identifying additional goals and objectives for future programming (Seevers et al., 1997).

Objective 6- Describe relevance of County Extension Directors demographics among program of focus areas as it pertained to needs assessment.

The four programmatic focus areas are Agriculture and Natural Resources, Family and Consumer Sciences, 4-H Youth Development, and Generalist. Thirty-eight County Extension Directors responded that have a focus area in Agriculture and Natural

Resources, 12 County Extension Directors responded that have a focus in Family and Consumer Sciences, 4 County Extension Directors responded that have a focus in 4-H Youth Development, and 10 County Extension Directors that are Generalist. County Extension Directions in all program focus areas perceived needs assessment as important. Since there is a wide range of difference in the number of County Extension Directors in a program area, caution is utilized in using County Extension Directors responses.

There was very little difference among program of focus areas in the assessment. The training needs noted in the competence areas should be taught to the entire group, and no one program area should be singled out. The SEAL Curriculum could be one of the baseline training modules provided to the County Extension Directors which will improve their knowledge base, and enhance their competence in need assessment, as well as equip them with the skills to adequately perform the duties of a County Extension Director according the MSU-ES Restructuring Plan, 2002. The lessons within the SEAL Curriculum are geared toward improving advisory boards, but can also be used as a teaching mechanism to train extension personnel. The assessment of the County Extension Directors coincided with what other researchers have recorded, such as Rossi, Freeman, & Lipsey (1999). The researchers, Rossi et al., (1999), stated that the fundamental need of a program cannot be effective at ameliorating a social problem if there is no problem to begin with or if the services provided do not actually relate to the problem. Rossi et al., (1999), also reported that needs assessment is a systematic approach to identifying social problems, determining their extent, and accurately defining the target population to be served and their need. Using needs assessment has been a common practice in program planning for Cooperative Extension Service (Mallilo, 1990).

Witkin and Altschuld (1995), stated “needs assessment is conducted to derive information and perception of values as a guide to making policy and program decisions that will benefit specific groups of people” (p. 6).

Witkin and Altschuld (1995) explained several benefits to needs assessment:

1. primary beneficiaries are the people whom the organization or agency serves,
2. laying the groundwork for designing a new or improved program of service or education, restructuring and organization in light of better understanding of its goals,
3. setting criteria for hiring training personnel, and
4. determining possible solutions to a complex problem. (p. 6)

Objective 7- Determine the knowledge and usage of Strengthening Extension Advisory Leaders Curriculum.

The responses were low in this area because 41 of the County Extension Directors reported that they have not participated in the SEAL training. When the question was asked, *Would they like to participate in the SEAL training*, 22 reported they would like to participate in the training, which means 52% of the responders would like to participate in SEAL training. Since there is an interest in the training, the SEAL Curriculum should be offered as an in-service training to County Extension Directors. Also, since County Extension Directors have numerous responsibilities, which are revealed in the MSU-ES Restructuring Plan, 2002. The word “need” is mentioned ten times in the job duties and responsibilities, of the County Extension Directors in the MSU-ES Restructuring Plan, 2002. Needs assessment is important to the Mississippi State University Extension Service programming.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions, there are several recommendations that were derived:

1. Provide in-service training on the Logic Model and Strengthening Extension Advisory Leaders Curriculum for Area Agents, Specialists, and 4-H Youth Agents, but make it a requirement for County Extension Directors.
2. Individuals who are interested in becoming a County Extension Director should receive credit if they have completed the SEAL Curriculum training.
3. Require current and new employees to attend SEAL and Logic Model in-service training within six months of assuming the role of County Extension Director.
4. Conduct an in-service training for Extension Staff on needs assessment and the role it plays within the MSU-ES System.
5. Provide an updated training on the SEAL Curriculum and Logic Model to administrators so they can be more effective in evaluating County Extension Directors in the area of needs assessment.
6. Provide in-service training on the SEAL Curriculum and the Logic Model to new Extension Professionals during the first year.
7. The Personnel Evaluation instrument should be revised to include needs assessment outcomes.
8. Use Borich Needs Assessment Model as a model to determine in-service training needs in other program areas of focus.
9. Reinforce that County Extension Directors use the SEAL Curriculum to train advisory leaders.

Suggestions for Further Research

The following research suggestions were derived from this study:

1. Further research should be conducted to assess the perceptions of 4-H Youth Agents, Area Agents, and Specialist on needs assessment.
2. Further research should be conducted to find out how the other Southern States are using the SEAL Curriculum.

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APPENDIX A

PERMISSION TO USE LOGIC MODEL

Subject	**Re: Permission to use Logic Model diagram**
From	Martha Jackson <marthaj@ext.msstate.edu
Date	Monday, June 30, 2008 11:17 am
To	Pamela DeVore <pam.devore@uwex.edu

Thanks!

I will send you a copy of the pages and I will cite the material by the copyright statement.

----- Original Message -----
From: Pamela DeVore <pam.devore@uwex.edu
Date: Monday, June 30, 2008 11:06 am
Subject: Re: Permission to use Logic Model diagram
To: Martha Jackson <marthaj@ext.msstate.edu
Cc: Ellen Taylor-Powell <ellen.taylor-powell@ces.uwex.edu

Martha,
You may use the logic Model diagram. Please use the example given when citing the material including the copyright statement. We would appreciate receiving a copy of the pages where the Logic Model information is used.

Sincerely,
Pamela DeVore, Publishing Operations
UW-Extension
Cooperative Extension Program Support
pam.devore@uwex.edu; 608/263-2770

Online catalog: http://learningstore.uwex.edu/

"An EEO/Affirmative Action employer, the University of Wisconsin- Extension provides equal opportunities in employment and programming, including Title IX and ADA requirements."

On Jun 29, 2008, at 3:36 AM, Martha Jackson wrote:

Good Morning,

I am asking your permission to use the Logic Model diagram as well the information on http://www.uwex.edu/ces/pdande/evaluation/ evallogicmodel.html in my dissertation. The original request is below but in searching the site I found that if I'm not from UWEX Cooperative Extension, I need to contact you for assistance. I will give the appropriate credit and follow the guidelines.

Thanks

Martha Jackson-Banks
4-H Youth Development Specialist
Phone 601-857-2284
Cellular 662-719-8705
Fax 601-857-2358

From: Martha Jackson <marthaj@ext.msstate.edu
Date: June 29, 2008 3:18:36 AM CDT
To: Dr. Jones<larry.jones@ces.uwex.edu
Cc: Jacquelyn Deeds <JDeeds@AIS.MsState.Edu
Subject: Permission to use Logic Model diagram

June 29, 2008

Dr. Larry Jones
Director, Program Development and Evaluation
615 Extension Building
432 North Lake Street
Madison, WI 53706

Dr. Jones:

I am Martha Jackson-Banks a Graduate Student at Mississippi State University. For my dissertation project, I will be conducting a study that examines the assessment of the in-service training needs of Mississippi State University County Extension Directors in the area of programming. The study will shed light on the in-service needs, perceptions, and implementation of needs assessment.

I am asking your permission to use the Logic Model diagram as well the information on http://www.uwex.edu/ces/pdande/evaluation/ evallogicmodel.html in my dissertation. I will give University of Wisconsin- Extension Program Development and Evaluation appropriate credit.

If you have any questions, please contact me at 662-719-8705, or my advisor, Dr. Jacquelyn Deeds, at 662-325-7834.

Thank You,
Martha Jackson-Banks

Martha Jackson-Banks
4-H Youth Development Specialist
Phone 601-857-2284
Cellular 662-719-8705
Fax 601-857-2358

APPENDIX B

PERMISSION TO USE BENTLEJEWSK SURVEY

Subject	**RE: Survey**
From	Jennifer Bentlejewski <jthorn@umd.edu>
Date	Monday, October 8, 2007 10:09 am
To	'Martha Jackson' <marthaj@ext.msstate.edu>

Martha,

Your dissertation topic sounds very interesting! I would love to see a copy when you have it completed, especially since I am a County Ext Director!
Attached is my survey. Please feel free to use any parts of it- just let me know if you do.
Good luck!

Jennifer

Dr. Jennifer Thorn Bentlejewski, RD
University of Maryland Cooperative Extension
County Extension Director- Allegany
Extension Educator, FCS-Allegany & Garrett Counties
301-724-3320 / 301-334-6960
jthorn@umd.edu

APPENDIX C

PERMISSION TO USE SCHWARZ SURVEY

Subject	**RE: Dissertation Survey**
From	"Schwarz, Michael" <mschwarz@vt.edu>
Date	Sunday, November 18, 2007 7:07 pm
To	Martha Jackson <marthaj@ext.msstate.edu>

Good Morning Martha,

Please feel free to do so. Best wishes for a Happy Thanksgiving.
Kind regards,

Michael

Michael H. Schwarz, Ph.D.
Associate Assistant Professor - FIW
Aquaculture Specialist - VSAREC
102 S. King Street
Hampton, VA, 23669

From: Martha Jackson [mailto:marthaj@ext.msstate.edu]
Sent: Sat 2007-11-17 09:06
To: Schwarz, Michael
Subject: Dissertation Survey

Good Morning, Dr.

Schwarz

I was wondering if you would grant me permission use sections of your survey for my dissertation on The Perceptions of Needs Assessment of Mississippi State University Extension County Directors. Thanks

Martha Jackson-Banks, Southwest Area
Leadership Development Agent
Phone 601-857-2284
Cellular 662-719-8705
Fax 601-857-2358

APPENDIX D

PANEL OF EXPERTS

Panel of Experts

Dr. Jacquelyn P. Deeds
Professor
School of Human Sciences

Dr. Walter Taylor
Assistant Dean & Professor
School of Human Sciences

Dr. Michael Newman
Professor
School of Human Sciences

Dr. Ronnie W. White
Extension Professor and Leader
School of Human Sciences

Dr. Beverly Howell
Retired FCS
State Program Leader

Mr. Dwayne Wheeler
Extension/Research Head
Central MS Research & Ext. Center

Mrs. Sonia Hancock
Retired County Extension Director
Rankin County

APPENDIX E

INSTRUMENT

1. Conducting Needs Assessment

1. For each category, please make two types of responses (each on a separate line). First, rate the IMPORTANCE of the skill. Second, rate YOUR COMPETENCE in the skill. Rate these using the scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being least important or competent and 5 being the most important or competent.

1 2 3 4 5

Construct a mail survey (IMPORTANCE)
1 2 3 4 5

Construct a mail survey (COMPETENCE)
1 2 3 4 5

Construct an on-line survey (IMPORTANCE)
1 2 3 4 5

Construct an on-line survey (COMPETENCE)
1 2 3 4 5

Write survey questions (IMPORTANCE)
1 2 3 4 5

Write survey questions (COMPETENCE)
1 2 3 4 5

Enter survey data into spreadsheets (IMPORTANCE)
1 2 3 4 5

Enter survey data into spreadsheets (COMPETENCE)
1 2 3 4 5

Analyze survey data (IMPORTANCE)
1 2 3 4 5

Analyze survey data (COMPETENCE)
1 2 3 4 5

Identify sources of statistical data (IMPORTANCE)
1 2 3 4 5

Identify sources of statistical data (COMPETENCE)
1 2 3 4 5

Access statistical data via the Internet (IMPORTANCE)
1 2 3 4 5

Access statistical data via the Internet (COMPETENCE)
1 2 3 4 5

Interpret statistical data (IMPORTANCE)
1 2 3 4 5

Interpret statistical data (COMPETENCE)
1 2 3 4 5

Set needs-based priorities for programming (IMPORTANCE)
1 2 3 4 5

Set needs-based priorities for programming (COMPETENCE)
1 2 3 4 5

Identify appropriate advisory group members (IMPORTANCE)
1 2 3 4 5

Identify appropriate advisory group members (COMPETENCE)
1 2 3 4 5

Train advisory groups on observation of local needs (IMPORTANCE)
1 2 3 4 5

Train advisory groups on observation of local needs (COMPETENCE)
1 2 3 4 5

Use a focus group to identify needs (IMPORTANCE)
1 2 3 4 5

Use a focus group to identify needs (COMPETENCE)
1 2 3 4 5

Use a case study to identify needs (IMPORTANCE)
1 2 3 4 5

Use a case study to identify needs (COMPETENCE)
1 2 3 4 5

Establish a benchmark for a need (IMPORTANCE)
1 2 3 4 5

Establish a benchmark for a need (COMPETENCE)
1 2 3 4 5

Develop an action plan to improve a need (IMPORTANCE)
1 2 3 4 5

Develop an action plan to improve a need (COMPETENCE)
1 2 3 4 5

2. Benefits of Needs Assessment

Please review each statement below and identify how strongly you agree or disagree with the benefits of needs assessment.

1. Identify your level of agreement with the statements below.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Needs assessment helps me determine if clientele are developing appropriate knowledge and skills.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Needs assessment allows me to determine if my curriculum is contributing to clientele learning.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Needs assessment efforts produce vital information to improve teaching.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Needs assessment enables me to identify necessary changes for future programs.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Needs assessment helps me inform the clientele about my expectations.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Needs assessment allows me to interact with Area Agents and Specialists in my program area.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Needs assessment allows me to interact with Area Agents and Specialists outside of my program area.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Needs assessment efforts are valued in the promotion and tenure process.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Needs assessment demonstrates learner improvements which I use for my quarterly report.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Needs assessment work leads to opportunities to present posters, speak at conferences, or publish articles.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Needs assessment expands my funding opportunities.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Needs assessment increases my capacity to understand the diverse needs of my clientele.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Needs Assessment provides critical information for strategic and program planning.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

3. Implementing Needs Assessment

1. Please review each statement below and identify how strongly you agree or disagree with implementing needs assessment.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

I lack extensive training in needs assessment techniques.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

I don't have needs assessment resources such as training manuals and/or web resources.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

I lack an understanding of effective needs assessment practices.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

I am not rewarded for my needs assessment efforts.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

I think that needs assessment is too complex and difficult to implement.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

I do not have time to carry out needs assessment projects.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

I feel that support for implementing needs assessment is lacking from administration.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

I use needs assessment for external audiences and program improvement.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

4. Using Needs Assessment

This section of the survey is intended to gather information about how you use and apply needs assessment results. Please review each statement below and determine how often that statement relates to the use of assessment results.

1. I use needs assessment results to:

Never Sometimes Often Always

Improve the quality of my county programming.
Never Sometimes Often Always

Improve my instructions.
Never Sometimes Often Always

Improve clientele well being.
Never Sometimes Often Always

Make decisions about planning.
Never Sometimes Often Always

Report progress on annual reports.
Never Sometimes Often Always

Secure funding from stakeholders.
Never Sometimes Often Always

Meet statewide mandates.
Never Sometimes Often Always

Gain recognition for quality programs.
Never Sometimes Often Always

Market programs to potential clientele.
Never Sometimes Often Always

Be accountable to stakeholders.
Never Sometimes Often Always

Verify that the needs assessment process itself has supplied the necessary information.

Never Sometimes Often Always

5. Demographics

1. What is your sex?

Male
Female

2. What is your main programmatic focus?

Agriculture & Natural Resources
Family & Consumer Sciences
4-H & Youth Development
Generalist

3. What is your highest level of education attained?

Bachelor's degree
Bachelor's degree plus graduate work towards masters
Master's degree
Specialist degree
Master's degree plus graduate work towards doctorate
Doctorate

4. Do you have an Extension Education degree?

Yes
No

5. If yes, did you get your degree from MSU or Other Institution?

MSU
Other Institution

6. If you have an Extension education degree from MSU what level of degree (s)?

Bachelor’s degree
Master’s degree
Bachelor’s and Master's
Specialist degree
Bachelor’s, Master's and plus graduate work towards doctorate
Bachelor’s, Master's and doctorate
Doctorate

Strengthening Extension Advisory Leaders

Have you participated in the Strengthening Extension Advisory Leaders (SEAL) training?

Yes

No

Would you like to participate in a Strengthening Extension Advisory Leaders (SEAL) training?

Yes
No

Have you used the Strengthening Extension Advisory Leaders (SEAL) curriculum with your advisory committees?

Yes
No

How useful did you find the SEAL Curriculum?

Not Useful at All
Somewhat Useful
Very Useful
Extremely Useful

Do you need additional training on the SEAL Curriculum?

Yes
No

Do you need additional copies of the SEAL Curriculum?

Yes
No

Please make any comments you would like about the survey and its ability to determine needs assessment information

APPENDIX F

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

Mississippi State University

May 20, 2008

Martha Jackson-Banks
1320 Seven Springs Road
Raymond, MS 39154

RE: IRB Study #08-141: An assessment of the inservice training needs of Mississippi Extension County Directors in the area of program needs assessment

Dear Ms. Jackson-Banks:

The above referenced project was reviewed and approved via administrative review on 5/20/2008 in accordance with 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2). Continuing review is not necessary for this project. However, any modification to the project must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation. Any failure to adhere to the approved protocol could result in suspension or termination of your project. The IRB reserves the right, at anytime during the project period, to observe you and the additional researchers on this project.

Please refer to your IRB number (#08-141) when contacting our office regarding this application.

Thank you for your cooperation and good luck to you in conducting this research project. If you have questions or concerns, please contact irb@research.msstate.edu or 325-3294.

Sincerely,

Katherine Crowley
Assistant IRB Compliance Administrator

cc: Dr. Jacquelyn Deeds

Office for Regulatory Compliance
P. O. Box 6223 • 70 Morgan Avenue • Mailstop 9563 • Mississippi State, MS 39762 • (662) 325-3294 • FAX (662) 325-8776

APPENDIX G

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT SURVEY

April 7, 2008

Dr. Melissa J. Mixon
VP/DAFVM/
Dean/Director
Box 9800
Mississippi State, MS 39762

Dear Dr. Mixon:

Mississippi State University Extension Service educates and empowers people to make sound decisions involving vocations, families, and their community environment. Changes within the Extension Service structure require analyzing how local Extension Directors perceive and utilize county needs assessment.

For my dissertation project, I will be conducting a study that examines the assessment of the in-service training needs of Mississippi State County Extension Directors in the area of programming. The study will shed light on the in-service needs, perceptions, and implementation of needs assessment.

I am asking your approval to conduct this study with County Extension Directors. The survey will consist of a sequence of questions relating to needs assessment. Demographic questions, gender, programmatic focus area, education level and Institution, and Knowledge of Strengthening Extension Advisory Leaders Curriculum (SEAL) will be asked on the survey. This study will be beneficial for Mississippi State University Extension Service as well as for stakeholders. I have included a copy of the survey. If you would like1 can share a copy of the results with you. If you have any questions, please contact me at 662-719-8705, or my advisor, Dr. Jacquelyn Deeds, at 662-325-7834.

Sincerely,

Martha Jackson-Banks

ok, provided you have IRB approved.
4/14/08

Martha Jackson-Banks

RECEIVED
APR 9 2008
VP for Agriculture, Forestry & Veterinary Medicine

cc: Dr. Will McCarty
Mr. Dwayne Wheeler

APPENDIX H

LETTERS TO RESPONDENTS

[Email]

marthaj@ext.msstate.edu

Needs Assessment Survey

Dear [FirstName] [LastName]:

Mississippi State University Extension Service educates and empowers people to make sound decisions involving vocations, families and their community environment. Changes within Mississippi State University Extension Service require analyzing how needs assessment is perceived and utilized.

You are invited to participate voluntarily in the survey. The survey is available, just click on the following link: http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx

It will take about 30 minutes to complete. Please complete the survey by August 27, 2008.

If you have questions pertaining to the survey, please contact me at 662-719-8705 or my advisor, Dr. Jacquelyn Deeds at 662-325-7834. You also may contact IRB at 662-325-3294.

This link is uniquely tied to this survey and your email address, please do not forward this message.

Thanks for your participation!

Please note: If you do not wish to receive further emails from us, please click the link below, and you will be automatically removed from our mailing list.
http://www.surveymonkey.com/optout.aspx

[Email]

marthaj@ext.msstate.edu

Needs Assessment Survey

Dear [FirstName] [LastName]:

As you are aware, there has been numerous changes within Mississippi State University Extension Service which require analyzing how needs assessment is perceived and utilized.

You are invited to participate voluntarily in this survey. The survey is available, just click on the following link:
http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx

I thank you for giving me 30 minutes of your time by filling out the survey by August 31, 2008.

If you have questions pertaining to the survey, please contact me at 662-719-8705 or my advisor, Dr. Jacquelyn Deeds at 662-325-7834. You also may contact IRB at 662-325-3294.

This link is uniquely tied to this survey and your email address, so please do not forward this message.

Thanks for your participation!

Please note: If you do not wish to receive further emails from us, please click the link below, and you will be automatically removed from our mailing list.
http://www.surveymonkey.com/optout.aspx

[Email]

marthaj@ext.msstate.edu

Needs Assessment Survey

Dear [FirstName] [LastName]:

As in the two invitations sent earlier, you are invited to participate voluntarily in this survey. The survey is available, just click on the following link:http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx

I thank you for giving me 30 minutes of your time by filling out the survey by September 6, 2008.

If you have questions pertaining to the survey, please contact me at 662-719-8705 or my advisor, Dr. Jacquelyn Deeds at 662-325-7834. You also may contact IRB at 662-325-3294.

This link is uniquely tied to this survey and your email address, so please do not forward this message.

Thanks for your participation!

Please note: If you do not wish to receive further emails from us, please click the link below, and you will be automatically removed from our mailing list.
http://www.surveymonkey.com/optout.aspx

[Email]

marthaj@ext.msstate.edu

Needs Assessment Survey

Dear [FirstName] [LastName]:

Again, you are invited to participate voluntarily in this survey. Click on the following link to access the survey: http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx

I thank you for giving me 30 minutes of your time by filling out the survey by September 12, 2008.

If you have questions pertaining to the survey, please contact me at 662-719-8705 or my advisor, Dr. Jacquelyn Deeds at 662-325-7834. You also may contact IRB at 662-325-3294.

This link is uniquely tied to this survey and your email address, so please do not forward this message.

Thanks for your participation!

Please note: If you do not wish to receive further emails from us, please click the link below, and you will be automatically removed from our mailing list.
http://www.surveymonkey.com/optout.aspx

Martha Jackson-Banks

September 9, 2008

County Extension Director

Dear_____,

Subject: Needs Assessment Survey

Mississippi State University Extension Service educates and empowers people to make sound decisions involving vocations, families and their community environment. Changes within Mississippi State University Extension Service require analyzing how needs assessment is perceived and utilized.

You are invited to participate voluntarily in the survey. The survey is enclosed. It will take about 30 minutes to complete. Please return the survey by September 17, 2008. I have provided a stamped, self-addressed envelope for you to return the survey.

If you have questions pertaining to the survey, please contact me at 662-719-8705 or my advisor, Dr. Jacquelyn Deeds at 662-325-7834. You also may contact IRB at 662-325-3294.

Thanks for your support!

Sincerely,

Martha Jackson-Banks