W1430

From Data to Display: Showcasing Program Successes and Impact Through Professional Presentations

Lydia Hoskins, Extension Specialist, Department of Family and Consumer Sciences
Karen Franck, Associate Professor, Department of Family and Consumer Sciences
Kristen Jones, Extension Agent, UT Extension Cannon County
Lauren Wells, Extension Specialist, Department of Family and Consumer Sciences
Lauren Woods, Extension Agent, UT Extension Knox County

Presenting at conferences offers an opportunity to showcase innovative programs, share findings that other professionals can build on and network with colleagues to exchange ideas and foster future collaborations. Conference presentations also help strengthen professional presentation skills and enhance a résumé, both of which are valuable for career advancement and promotion.

Plan ahead for conference submissions. When exploring opportunities to showcase your work, consider the conference topic area, location and available funding. Review previous years' agendas to identify tracks or sessions where your work may be a good fit. As you develop annual impact statements and plan programming for the coming year, consider potential conference presentation opportunities. Submission portals vary by conference, but many open between January and March. Therefore, consider submitting abstracts based on programs completed or products developed during the preceding year.



Identifying Programs

Developing and implementing new programs creates opportunities to share your work at local, state, regional and national conferences. As you design and implement programs, consider how your work aligns with current priorities, emerging trends and the interests of your target audience. Planning with dissemination in mind from the beginning can also make the conference submission and presentation process more manageable.

When deciding whether a program is a good candidate for conference presentation, ask yourself the following questions.

Is this Program Worth Sharing?

Consider whether the program:

- Addresses a timely or emerging issue.
- Demonstrates innovation in program design, delivery or partnerships.
- Reaches a unique audience or setting.
- Produces meaningful evaluation results or measurable outcomes.
- Offers lessons learned that others could apply in their own communities.

Consider Your Audience

Understanding your audience will help determine the level of detail, presentation style and key messages to emphasize. Ask yourself:

- Who will attend this conference?
- Are they practitioners, Extension professionals, researchers, healthcare providers or policymakers?
- What information will be most valuable to them?
- How can your findings help improve their work?

Build Evaluation into Your Program

Programs with strong evaluation are easier to share and more likely to be accepted for presentation. Whenever possible:

- Use reliable and consistent evaluation tools.
- Collect baseline and follow-up data.
- Document participation, implementation and outcomes.
- Include both quantitative and qualitative findings when appropriate.

Think About Audience Engagement

Consider how your program can be presented in an engaging way. Examples include:

- Interactive polling (e.g., Mentimeter)
- Knowledge checks and quizzes (e.g., Kahoot!)
- Demonstrations or hands-on activities
- Videos, photographs and participant testimonials
- Visual displays of evaluation results

Common Barriers to Dissemination

Many professionals have valuable work to share but hesitate to submit conference abstracts.
Common barriers include:

- Fear of public speaking or presentation anxiety
- Limited confidence or experience
- Lack of mentorship or constructive feedback
- Time constraints and competing responsibilities
- Registration, travel and lodging costs
- Scheduling conflicts or limited staff coverage
- Accessibility or health considerations

Remember that these barriers are common—many conferences, universities and professional organizations offer mentoring programs, scholarships, travel awards and presentation resources to help first-time presenters succeed. Reach out and discuss your concerns with your Regional Program Leader, your mentor, and FCS faculty and specialists. These leaders can help provide guidance on how you can get started in the presentation process as well as potential conferences to consider and funding sources.

Identifying Conferences

Selecting the right conference can increase the visibility and impact of your work while creating opportunities for professional development and collaboration. Conference audiences, themes and submission requirements vary, so it is important to identify venues that align with your program area, scholarly interests and available travel resources.

The conferences below represent examples of local, state, regional and national opportunities where Extension professionals may disseminate program outcomes, share innovative practices, build professional networks and learn about emerging research and evidence-based interventions. While not exhaustive, these conferences align with many Family and Consumer Sciences, Community Health, Consumer Economics, Human Development, and Extension program areas.

Local and Regional Opportunities

- County Commission meetings
- School Board meetings
- Local Health Council meetings
- Regional planning and development conferences
- Regional aging network meetings
- Community coalition meetings
- Chamber of Commerce events
- Civic and service organization meetings or lunch-and-learns (e.g., Lions Club, Kiwanis)

State Opportunities (Tennessee)

- Tennessee Public Health Association (TPHA) Annual Conference
- Tennessee Rural Health Association Annual Conference
- Tennessee Nutrition Conference
- Tennessee Housing Development Agency (THDA) Housing Conference
- Tennessee Commission on Aging and Disability conferences and summits
- Tennessee Prevention Network Conference
- Tennessee Farm to School Conference
- Tennessee Extension Professional Associations
- Tennessee Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
- Tennessee State Conference on Aging

Regional Opportunities

- Southern Gerontological Society Annual Meeting
- Southern Rural Sociological Association Annual Meeting
- Southern Region Extension Conference
- Southern Obesity Summit

National Opportunities

Family & Consumer Sciences

- National Extension Association of Family and Consumer Sciences (NEAFCS) Conference
- American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences (AAFCS)
- National Extension Conference on Volunteerism
- National ESP (Epsilon Sigma Phi) Conference
- Engagement Scholarship Consortium Conference

Community Health & Human Development

- National Health Outreach Conference (NHOC)
- American Public Health Association (APHA) Annual Meeting
- National Rural Health Association (NRHA) Annual Conference
- Society for Public Health Education (SOPHE) Annual Conference
- American Society on Aging (ASA) On Aging Conference
- Gerontological Society of America (GSA) Annual Conference

Human Development

- National Council on Family Relations (NCFR) Annual Conference
- National Association of Extension 4-H Youth Development Professionals (NAE4-HYDP) Annual Conference
- National Afterschool Association Convention
- Extension Leadership Conference

Nutrition and Food Systems

- American Society for Nutrition (ASN) Conference
- Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior (SNEB) Annual Conference
- Food & Nutrition Conference & Expo (Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics)
- National Farm to Cafeteria Conference
- Food and Nutrition Conference & Expo (FNCE)

Consumer Economics

- Association for Financial Counseling and Planning Education (AFCPE) Symposium
- Association for Financial Education and Counseling (AFEC) Conference
- National Association of Community Development Extension Professionals (NACDEP)
- Joint Council of Extension Professionals (JCEP)
- PILD: Public Issues Leadership Development

Determine Type of Conference Submission

Determining which conference submission type to choose depends on how much time you need, how interactive you want the session to be and how developed your work is. It also helps to consider your goals: visibility, feedback, networking or displaying results.

- **Poster session-** ideal for sharing work-in-progress or visually rich projects; presenters stand by their poster during a time block while attendees circulate, ask questions and engage in brief conversations. Posters offer high foot-traffic visibility and flexible, low-pressure interaction.
- **Concurrent paper presentation-** a scheduled oral presentation delivered to a seated audience; formats vary, but common structures include 15-20 minute talks with additional time for Q&A or shorter lightning-style presentations. This format works well for more developed work or projects that benefit from a structured narrative.
- **Round table-** this session emphasizes discussion rather than formal presentation, allowing close interaction and collaborative conversation with attendees. Roundtables are ideal for exploratory topics or issues where you want to learn from peers as much as you want to share.

Choosing among these depends on whether you prefer structured speaking time (concurrent), informal dialogue (roundtable) or flexible, visual engagement (poster). It can also help to think about what you want from the session: broader exposure, targeted feedback or deeper conversation.

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval for Data Collection

When collecting data from people it is important to think about whether or not you need Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. University of Tennessee has an IRB that reviews potential research projects for UT students, employees and faculty and includes research projects that involve human subjects. If you are working with a faculty member who is collecting data about a project, often the faculty member has received IRB approval.

IRB approval includes consent forms, recruitment materials, and surveys or other data collection instruments like focus group or interview questions and protocols. Because the IRB review and approval process can take time, consider potential IRB requirements early in the program planning process. If you are interested in collecting this type of data, you must complete CITI training.

Contact Karen Franck at **kfranck@utk.edu** for more information about the IRB process.

If your program is part of a grant, it is important that you contact the faculty or specialist who is affiliated with the grant funding. Discuss your ideas and see how the grant needs to be acknowledged and who needs to be included in the proposal.

Who should be included in an acknowledgment?

Acknowledge any outside funding that was received. It is also appropriate to acknowledge key partners and community members in a blanket statement: “I would like to acknowledge the contributions made by the X county health department staff and community members who participated in this study.” Acknowledgments usually come at the end of a presentation.

Data Collection for proposals and abstract development

Sharing your program results through conferences and publications strengthens Extension's credibility and visibility, helps other agents learn what works, and demonstrates impact to funders and stakeholders. The first step is knowing how to collect the right data—and how to talk about it clearly.

Each professional conference has guidelines and requirements for submitting a proposal. Common elements often include:

- Abstract
- Program description
- Methods
- Analyses
- Results
- Implications for practice

What Is an Abstract?

An abstract is a short, stand-alone summary of your project or program. It gives readers a brief overview of what you did, why it mattered, and what you found.

- Abstracts are usually structured around purpose, methods, results and conclusion/implications.
- Accepted conference abstracts often appear in the conference program.

Key Considerations

- Tailor to your audience (reviewers, practitioners, Extension professionals, researchers).
- Always check the specific conference guidelines for writing guidance, word count, and blind-review requirements.
- Align with conference themes or priorities.
- Clearly communicate relevance and impact.

Example Abstract Opening:

"This project evaluated a community-based nutrition education program focused on healthy cooking practices delivered in one county across three program sites. Participants (N=42, mean age 72) completed pre- and post-program assessments measuring cooking confidence, nutrition knowledge, and frequency of preparing healthy meals at home."

Methods — How Did You Collect Your Data?

The Methods section explains how you gathered information about your program participants and outcomes. Think of it as the "how we did it" section. Good methods are the foundation of credible results.

Identify What You Are Measuring

Before collecting data, decide what success looks like for your program. Common measures for Extension programs include:

- Program reach (number of participants, number of graduates, demographics)
- Program satisfaction (program ratings, likelihood to recommend or attend similar programs)
- Knowledge gained (improved scores on pre/post surveys)
- Behavior changes based on program participation
- Health outcomes based on program participation (lower blood pressure, improved blood sugar, weight loss, etc.)

Types of Data to Capture

- Process Measures
  - Number of participants
  - Program sessions delivered
  - Demographics (if applicable)
- Outcomes
  - Changes in knowledge
  - Skill development
  - Behavior change
  - Health outcomes

- Impact
  - Short-term (awareness, intent)
  - Intermediate (behavior adoption)
  - Long-term (health, economic, or social outcomes)
  - Reference FCS Extension impact indicators where applicable

- Ongoing Data Collection
  - Maintain consistent data collection throughout program delivery
  - Use:
    - Program records
    - The System for University Planning, Evaluation, and Reporting (SUPER) reporting systems
    - Attendance logs and participation tracking

Choosing Your Data Collection Tool

Match your tool to your audience and setting:

- Paper surveys — reliable in low-tech or older adult settings
- Online surveys (Qualtrics, Google Forms) — efficient for larger groups, easier to analyze
- Validated instruments — use published tools when available to strengthen credibility
- Attendance logs and enrollment records — easy to collect and useful for reach data
- Alternative data collection tools

Timing of Data Collection

Collect data at multiple points to show change over time. A standard approach:

Time Point	What to Collect
Baseline (Before program begins)	Demographics, knowledge pre-test, behavior self-report
Post-program (Immediately after)	Knowledge post-test, behavior change, satisfaction
Follow-up (30, 60, or 90 days later)	Sustained behavior change, outcome indicators

Why collect baseline data? Baseline data provides a point of comparison. Without it, you cannot demonstrate whether your program led to change—only how participants scored at the end of the program.

Writing Your Methods Section

When writing your methods for an abstract or manuscript, briefly address:

- Who participated (sample size, age range, county/setting)
- What program was delivered (name, dosage, delivery format)
- How the data were collected (instrument name, time points)
- *If applicable: How data were analyzed (e.g., paired t-test, descriptive statistics)

Example Methods Statement:

"A total of 64 adults participated in a healthy cooking and nutrition education program delivered across three community sites within X county. Participants completed surveys assessing nutrition knowledge, cooking confidence, and frequency of preparing healthy meals at home at baseline and program completion. Descriptive statistics (e.g., frequencies, percentages, and mean scores) were used to summarize pre- and post-program changes."

Results — What Did You Find?

The Results section is where you report your findings objectively—what the data showed, without interpretation or opinion. Focus on presenting the numbers, trends, and patterns revealed by your data. Save explanations of what the results mean for the Discussion or Conclusions section.

What to Include

- Sample description: Who participated? (N=, age, percent female, locations served)
- Program reach: How many people completed the program? Retention rate?
- Outcome findings: Did scores improve? By how much?
- Trends: Were certain groups more likely to show change?

Be specific with numbers: Avoid vague statements such as "participants improved." Instead, report the actual results. For example, "Nutrition knowledge scores increased from 62 percent to 85 percent, and the proportion of participants preparing healthy meals at least four times per week increased from 40 percent to 68 percent." Specific, data-driven findings are more credible and provide stronger evidence of program impact.

How to Report Common Statistics

You do not need to be a statistician, but you do need to report results accurately. Here are the most common formats:

Statistic	How to Write It
Mean (average)	"The average age of participants was 72.4 years (SD = 6.1)." "Participants identified top resource needs that included up-to-date curriculum (M = 4.73, SD = .45) and funding (M = 4.64, SD = .48)."
Percentages	"68% of participants reported preparing healthy meals more frequently post-program."
Pre-post comparison (t-test)	"Average nutrition knowledge scores increased from 62% pre-program to 85% post-program, and cooking confidence improved from a mean score of 3.1 to 4.2 on a 5-point scale (t(49) = -2.01, p < .05)." For a t-test you would report the degrees of freedom in (), the t score and the p level (see significance information below).
Retention	"Of 60 enrolled, 50 (83%) completed the program
Significance	For t-tests or other tests that compare means like chi-squares make sure to include the p value. This indicates if the change in scores was statistically significant. Typically, p values less than .05 are statistically significant. If the p value is not significant then clearly state this: "There were no significant changes from pre- to post-program for food resource management questions. However, mean scores from pre to post did increase indicating a positive trend."

For help with statistics and interpretation of results, remember that all UT employees receive 50 free hours of statistical consulting through OIT. Website: **oit.utk.edu/**

Example Results Section:

"Participants were enrolled across three community sites within one county. A total of 64 older adults were enrolled, and 50 completed the program (78.1 percent retention rate). Most participants identified as female (76 percent) and white (88 percent) and mean age was 72.4 years (SD = 6.1). Nutrition knowledge scores increased from an average of 62 percent at baseline to 85 percent at program completion. Cooking confidence improved from 3.1 to 4.2 on a 5-point scale ($t(49) = -2.01$, $p < .05$). Additionally, the proportion of participants preparing healthy meals at least four times per week increased from 40 percent to 68 percent. Participants with lower baseline cooking confidence showed the greatest improvements in both confidence and frequency of healthy meal preparation."

Discussion & Implications

After presenting your results, briefly explain what they mean for participants, Extension programming, and future efforts. This section answers the question, "So what?" by highlighting the significance of the findings and their practical implications.

What to Address

- What do the results suggest for program delivery or targeting?
- Are there subgroups who may need additional support or different approaches?
- What are the limitations of your data? (e.g., no control group, self-reported outcomes, selection bias)
- What are the next steps for your program or your county?
- How can this inform future work, scaling, or replication?

Example Discussion Statement:

"These findings align with broader evidence supporting community-based nutrition education programs as effective approaches for improving healthy cooking behaviors among older adults. The observed improvements in cooking confidence and meal preparation frequency suggest that skill-building and hands-on learning are key components of behavior change. Limitations include the absence of a control group and reliance on self-reported outcomes, which may introduce response bias. Future programming may benefit from incorporating follow-up support to sustain behavior changes over time."

Awareness of Resources and Funding

Before assuming conference travel or scholarship is out of reach, explore available resources.

County and University Funding

- County-specific programming funds (check with your county director regarding allowable uses)
- Department- or college-specific travel support
- Graduate student travel awards (e.g., Graduate Student Senate Travel Awards)
- Undergraduate travel grants (e.g., Undergraduate Research and Fellowships)
- E.J. Chapman scholarship opportunities

Professional Organizations

- First-time attendee or presenter scholarships
- Student and early-career professional awards
- Volunteer opportunities that include waived registration

Grant Funding

- Conference travel can often be supported through grant funding if included in the approved budget.
  - Example: EFNEP and other externally funded projects may include travel support.

Additional Tips for Success

- Start collecting evaluation data before you think you'll need it.
- Use simple, standardized evaluation tools whenever possible.
- Store data in an organized, easily accessible location.

Putting It All Together — Abstract Checklist

Use this checklist before submitting any conference proposal:

- ☐ Sought feedback from a peer, specialist, program lead or other colleague before submission
- ☐ Clearly stated the purpose or objective
- ☐ Identified the target audience (who, where and how many)
- ☐ Described the program or intervention
- ☐ Explained the evaluation methods and timing
- ☐ Reported key findings with meaningful numbers
- ☐ Included statistical significance or effect sizes, when appropriate
- ☐ Acknowledged important limitations
- ☐ Discussed implications, recommendations, or next steps
- ☐ Met conference formatting and word-count requirements
- ☐ Completed a final spelling and grammar review

Conference Abstract Planning Worksheet

Use the questions below to organize your thoughts before writing your abstract.

Purpose

What problem, need, or opportunity did your program address? What was the objective?

Methods

Who participated? What program or intervention was delivered? How was it evaluated?

Results

What were the key findings? Include participant numbers, outcome measures, and quantitative results whenever possible.

Implications

Why do these findings matter? How can they inform future programming, practice, or research?



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