Department of Family and Consumer Sciences

Sharing Impact: Writing a Compelling Success Story

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Sharing stories of impact is an important component of Extension programming. Extension agents and educators can use stories to show how programs improve the lives of individuals, families and communities. Compelling success stories combined with statistical outcomes help people understand what the numbers mean. Stories bring "life" to the data.

Stories are important for many reasons and can be used to:

- Highlight experiences of participants
- Showcase the impact of Extension programs
- Recognize the role of community partners
- Educate decision-makers
- Demonstrate responsible use of funds
- Share ideas and lessons learned

Levels of Impact

The impact of our programs can happen at the most basic level, or the impact may be deeper and more long term. Your choices about what stories and quotes to use will depend on how you plan to use them. Stories may be used for marketing, recruiting participants, collaborating with other Extension staff or reporting to funders and community partners.

Success stories and quotes can fall into one or more of five levels of impact.

Level	Description	Example
Program Satisfaction	The participant liked the program.	*"I like all the hands-on things we do in class."*
Knowledge Gains	The participant learned something new by attending the program.	*"Knowing more efficient ways of cooking meals by shopping correctly will save me a lot of money."*
Short-term Practices	The participant made a short-term behavior change as a result of attending the program.	*"I really look at labels now, and I watch for sugar in everything."*
Long-term Behavior Changes	The participant made a long-term behavior change after attending the program.	"*I'm still using the information and skills I learned in your nutrition class eight years ago.*"
Broader Program Impacts	The participant's family, friends or community benefited from what the participant learned in the program.	"*My momma and I fixed chicken and marinated it overnight. I told my momma not to use the same plate after she cooked the chicken. I told her she needs to use a clean plate to keep from getting cross contamination.*"

Collecting Stories of Impact

Stories of impact come from both your observations as an Extension educators and what participants share about how a program has impacted them directly.

Stories are all around us. As you deliver programs in your county, you may hear participants talk about how a program helped them or their family.

Here are some tips for finding stories:

- Listen to what participants share about their experiences with the program
- Write down what participants share about how the program has helped them
- Ask for feedback from participants using index cards or paper forms
- Write down what community partners share with you about impact; also, save any correspondence from partners (such as email messages and letters); keeping notes about these experiences can make it easier to write stories later

Writing a Story

Start with a short introduction

Begin with 1 to 2 sentences that provide background and context. Include:

- The agent or educator's name

- The county
- The title of the program or curriculum
- The program setting/site
- The target audience

Write the main part of the story

The next 3 to 5 sentences should focus on the participant(s) and form the core of the story. Consider including:

- What a participant **learned**
- A participant's **behavior changes**
- Impact on **family, friends, or community**
- A **challenge** that a participant has overcome
- A **goal** that the participant achieved

Include quotes and photos when possible

Direct quotes from program participants or educators help make stories more meaningful. Quality photographs can strengthen a story and help others connect with the experience. These are strong assets and provide authenticity and richness to the story.

Ethical considerations

When writing about program impact, it is important to follow ethical guidelines. Protect the privacy of participants and obtain written permission for all media use. When sharing stories, show respect for participants and avoid stereotypes or oversimplifying a participant's experience. Stories should reflect the real experiences of participants while honoring their dignity and contributions.

Example

In fall 2022, EFNEP educator Angie Beaty led a series of Family Cooking Nights at a Knox County elementary school. For the six-week series, parents and children would meet in the school cafeteria one night a week, excited about learning together.

At the start of each class, Angie taught a nutrition lesson, and the families prepared recipes at cooking stations. Angie noticed that parents enjoyed the time with their children: "They are really loving cooking with their kids." One parent said, "These classes have really helped our family. Our son has tried a sample of each of the foods prepared during class and has asked me to buy more fruits and vegetables for meals and snacks. He has never been willing to try new fruits or vegetables before. We have been cooking more at home now and have saved money in our food budget."

Word spread about the cooking nights, and two more schools signed on that spring to offer the program.



Family making meals and memories at EFNEP Family Cooking Night. Photo taken by Angie Beaty

Conclusion

As you deliver Extension programming in your county, continue to be on the lookout for stories of impact. Use the guidance in this publication to record success stories, developing them further into clear and compelling content that can be shared.

Resources

Ethical Storytelling: The Role of Ethical Storytelling in Evaluating Extension's Impact. UT Extension, Institute of Agriculture, University of Tennessee. 2022. *https://solutions.tennessee.edu/publication/W1078/*

Impact and Value: Telling Your Program's Story. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).2007. *https://emorycenters4phtraining.emory.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/052416_success_story_workbook.pdf*

Storytelling as Best Practice: How Stories Strengthen Your Organization, Engage Your Audience, and Advance Your Mission (8th ed.) Andy Goodman. The Goodman Center, 2019.



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