Increasing Efficiency in Extension Using the Train-the-Trainer Approach[1]

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Summary

Extension saw severe fiscal cuts related to the recession of 2007–2009, resulting in a reduction in the number of agents and resources available (Serenari, Peterson, Bardon, & Brown, 2013). Consequently, Extension agents' responsibilities have increased, leaving them to do more with less (Clary, White, & Mullins, 2000). As Clary et al. (2000) described, "[b]eing in touch with a larger number of people in more divergent locations is the reality of Extension agents' duties" (para. 5). In this new reality, Extension professionals often seek ways to improve efficiency. Training every possible end client individually can be costly, time-consuming, and potentially unrealistic, depending on the size of an agent's county and audience.

Extension has adapted to today's financial realities through a number of strategies, including increased reliance on partnerships (Serenari et al., 2013). One strategy that expands the reach of an Extension agent and capitalizes on partners is the "train-the-trainer" approach. This approach is useful in both workplace and Extension education settings. When using the train-the-trainer approach, an Extension agent teaches individuals who will then teach the end user. Extension agents may consider using this approach to build a team of proficient educators and volunteers who can train clients and act as extensions of the agent. The train-the-trainer approach "creates a multiplier effect, expanding the overall impacts of the program to reach greater numbers of people" (Skelton & Josiah, 2003, Discussion, para. 3). A key advantage to this approach is reduced travel costs and increased flexibility in scheduling programs (Richards, Pratt, Skolits, & Burnery, 2012).

The purpose of this article is to describe the train-the-trainer approach as it applies to Extension programming, provide contextual examples from within and beyond UF/IFAS Extension, and offer best management practices. This publication is intended for Extension professionals working in any discipline.

Extension Agents as Trainers-of-Trainers

When applying the train-the-trainer approach to Extension programming, an expert, such as an Extension agent or specialist, teaches others to deliver programs to the end user. Often, the first step is for the future instructor to observe a program led by an experienced instructor. Observation activities may be followed by training workshops that encompass educational delivery methods as well as technical subject matter (Duggan, 2014).

In addition to developing a pool of individuals who can expand the reach of an Extension program, Extension agents may find other benefits by training other trainers: increased leadership and listening skills; exposure to diverse

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and valuable perspectives; and even increased satisfaction with their work (Murphy & Carson-Warner, 2013).

Below, we offer examples through a number of formalized train-the-trainer approaches that are replicated throughout the state or country, as well as examples of less formal, unique train-the-trainer programs that were developed to meet specific local needs.

Examples from Extension

4-H

4-H is fundamentally built upon the train-the-trainer concept. Each year, volunteers participate in county, state, and national training by 4-H agents about the best practices of positive youth development, youth protection, and subject matter expertise. Using an agent-led, volunteer-delivered approach (Diem, 2013) enables 4-H to experience a multiplier effect, greatly expanding the number of opportunities for youth to participate beyond what would be possible using only paid 4-H professionals. For example, 92 Florida 4-H agents trained 19,096 volunteers who facilitated the participation of 222,942 youth in 4-H programming in 2012–2013 (University of Florida, 2014).

Communicating Public Value of Extension

The University of Minnesota Extension program developed a Building Extension's Public Value (BEPV) program that teaches Extension agents to identify the value their programs provide to the community and to communicate this value to non-participant stakeholders in meaningful ways. This program has been working to build a pool of qualified Extension agents who are skilled at communicating the value and advocating for Extension. The BEPV program has trained hundreds of Extension professionals directly. To expand on the reach of the BEPV workshops, a train-the-trainer program was developed to train other Extension professionals to train more Extension agents. Using this approach, the BEPV program has expanded into 17 states, throughout which hundreds of Extension professionals have been instructed in teaching BEPV workshops for their local organizations (Kalambokidis, 2011).

Community Forestry

The University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension Service, the Nebraska Forest Service, and the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum conduct Nebraska Tree Care Workshops every year (Skelton & Josiah, 2003). These workshops reach 300-400 people annually, and follow a train-the-trainer approach. Their goal is to "create a cadre of people well trained in tree selection and care who can train others and/or provide improved tree-related services to the public" (Skelton & Josiah, 2003, Introduction, para 3.). Skelton and Josiah asserted their program highlights the value of using the train-the-trainer approach. As a result of the train-the-trainer workshops, Nebraska Tree Care Workshop participants significantly increased knowledge about proper tree care, improved their tree care skills, and most importantly, 63% of participants had trained others about what they had learned (Skelton & Josiah, 2003).

Pesticide Train-the-Trainer

In 1992 the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) implemented the federal Worker Protection Standard (WPS). The purpose of the WPS is to protect the health and safety of agricultural workers and pesticide handlers on certain agricultural establishments. This law required the training of approximately two million farm workers nationwide (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2014) with retraining currently required every five years. This daunting task required a multitude of trainers. EPA has an agreement with the states to utilize the Extension Service for pesticide training (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2014). Through this agreement EPA permits the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to approve train-the-trainer programs created by the University of Florida Extension for the WPS (FDACS, 2014). The train-the-trainer program has developed the needed trainers by educating them about the correct information and methods necessary to train the agricultural workers. Between 1992 and 2013, 13,569 trainers were trained through this program in Florida (FDACS, 2014). Each trainer has the capacity to train a number of agricultural workers. The multiplier effect has enabled this program to reach a substantial percentage of Florida's agricultural workers.

Master Gardener Program

The Florida Master Gardener program began in 1979 and has utilized the train-the trainer model throughout its existence. Through this program, volunteers attend intensive educational programming and in turn provide education to members of their communities. There are active Master Gardener programs in most of the 67 counties in the state. Master Gardener volunteers must attend at least 50 hours of training initially and then must receive a minimum of 10 hours of continued training each year to maintain a current certification. County Extension Agent Master Gardener coordinators provide the training needed for the volunteers to deliver training based on their audience needs. Audience members usually consist of the general public, garden club groups, or other Master Gardeners. Delivering presentations accounts for about 5.5% of the volunteer hours that

Master Gardeners donate each year. In 2013, the trained-trainer Master Gardeners delivered over 20,000 hours of educational presentations. Without the Master Gardeners, it would not be possible for county Extension agents to meet the demand for their educational programs.

Youth Nutrition Programs

Tennessee food safety educators developed *Hands On: Real World Lessons for Middle School Classrooms* to provide adolescents with effective food safety education (Richards, Pratt, Skolits, & Burnery, 2012). The pilot program was found to be successful in increasing knowledge, improving attitudes, and changing food-safety behaviors, and it grew rapidly. After six years, the program expanded to serving over 8,000 students in several states, and the original trainers were unable to meet the demands of this growth. For this reason, the train-the-trainer approach was applied, and Extension agents were engaged in training teachers to use the curriculum. Extension agents attend a three-day workshop to learn how to train teachers to instruct their students. Following the train-the-trainer program, Extension agents are able to conduct two-day training workshops with teachers in their local communities. Of the nine Tennessee Extension agents who participated in one train-the-trainer program, six recruited a total of 41 local teachers, who can, in turn, train a substantial number of students (Richards et al., 2012).

Best Practices for Applying Train-the-Trainer to Programming

If you have decided to use the train-the-trainer approach to increase your reach, there are a number of factors to consider to ensure your success[1]:

Before the train-the-trainer program

- Conduct needs assessment activities to guide programming
- Identify SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound) objectives (Diehl & Galindo-Gonzalez, 2012)
- Develop materials and activities that will logically lead to meeting the objectives
- Reserve sufficient time to plan the training and become comfortable with the material
- Plan training for both subject matter and delivery methods
- Develop methods to evaluate the initial training
- Develop methods to evaluate future instructors' training contacts and activities
- Collect any required/program-specific training materials

During the train-the-trainer program

- Provide icebreakers so participants can feel more comfortable with one another
- Explain the material in common language; "use your own words"
- Incorporate real examples and experiential learning activities
- Provide opportunities for discussion and feedback
- Allow participants to practice new skills
- Discuss how new instructors will participate in the evaluation of their teaching activities and collect feedback, modifying the process if appropriate
- Use required/program-specific training materials as specified by any lead agency

After the train-the-trainer program

- Provide continued support for instructors and volunteers
- Conduct evaluation activities
- Use findings and feedback to plan for future programs
- Track the training activities and associated outcomes conducted by new trainers

[1]Adapted from Biech (2009) and Murphy & Carson-Warner (2013).

Evaluating Train-the-Trainer Programs

The planning process for training people to train others is no different from any other Extension program. It is important to have a clear understanding of the situation, along with SMART objectives and an evaluation plan applicable to the intended outcomes (Diehl & Galindo-Gonzalez, 2012). Evaluation findings are useful in understanding the quality of the learning environment and teaching program, and can guide changes to future logistics (Israel, Diehl, & Galindo-Gonzalez, 2013).

Train-the-trainer programs create a multiplier effect, and evaluation plans should take this into consideration. Extension agents who employ this strategy should plan to track how many volunteers/trainers were trained and how many end clientele these volunteers/trainers reached. Additionally, it may be beneficial to establish a system for evaluating the performance of those who have been trained.

For example, one key objective would be to increase the number of instructors who are able to teach a class successfully.

Summary

The train-the-trainer approach has the potential to increase the overall impact of an Extension program exponentially by reaching more people in diverse locations and with distinct needs. This document provides a description of the train-the-trainer approach to Extension programming, gives examples from within and beyond UF/IFAS Extension, and offers best management practices. Extension agents working in any discipline may find this strategy to be a useful method of increasing the efficiency of their programs.

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