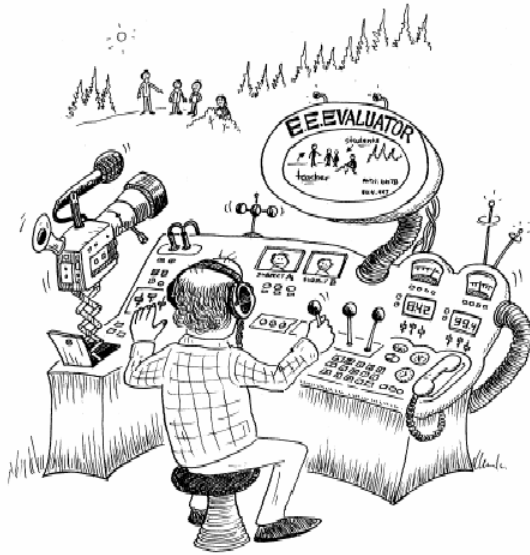


# Evaluation of Educational Mini-Grant Projects



Evaluation is a scary word. My experience has been that as soon as you use that word, people get their backs up and feel like they are going to be evaluated, and hence judged. It gets personal very easily.

-Margaret Floyd,  
Sparks Strategies, 2002

**Securing funds for conservation efforts, including educational projects, is becoming more competitive. Sponsors need to know the results of their investment.**

Developing an effective evaluation tool is key to measuring and reporting the success of your project. Evaluation should go well beyond asking participants whether they “enjoyed” the lunch or the bus ride. Evaluation should address the outcomes of your project. Did your target audience (the participants) change their behavior and attitudes? In other words, *did the project really make a difference?*

To help PACD Mini-grant recipients develop the evaluation aspect of their projects, we have put together some ideas for program evaluation. While some evaluations can be very in-depth and complicated, there are simple things you can do to help monitor the success of your project.

## Before your event:

1. Your evaluation should be designed to help you measure how well you have reached the project goals and what you might do to improve or build upon your project in the future.
2. Plan your method of evaluation at the beginning of the project. Don't leave it until the end.
3. If you are developing a questionnaire or interview form, try it out on people. That helps to get the bugs out. Then, revise it and try it out again.

4. Send us an email with your planned evaluation form, response card or whatever you are using. We'll give you feedback on it.
5. Behavior change is a slow process. That's ok. People often make changes step-by-step.
6. Some of your audience members may be at a different stage of adoption than others. For instance, the farmer attending your field day, who is new to the idea of no-till, may not be ready to implement the practice this year. Another farmer, who has some prior exposure to the concept, may leave your field day having made a commitment to converting to no-till.
7. Try to understand the needs of your target audience and design your project and evaluation tool so that helps move them to adoption (for instance, help increase their awareness, provide information that addresses their concerns or attitudes, etc.).

## **Some Methods Used to Measure Project Effectiveness:**

### **Festivals/Booths/Exhibits**

- **Spot interviews** – Have a roving interviewer(s) ask a few questions of people attending the festival. Questions could include “Name one thing you’ve learned about today that you plan to do that will improve our water quality,” or “What one new healthy-environment action will you try at home because of what you’ve seen today?” Offer a small reward, such as a piece of candy for taking the survey. Make sure you train your interviewers.
- **Response cards** – Ask attendees to fill out a response card (with similar questions as above). Offer a small reward for completing the card, such as a piece of candy or a chance of winning a free hat. Have a well-labeled box for responders to put completed cards in.
- For a more in-depth evaluation of a display, see this webpage: <http://www.extension.psu.edu/evaluation/pdf-ex/PAEX13.pdf>.
- This survey is a bit more that you’ll probably want, but the procedure on this evaluation maybe useful to you: <http://www.extension.psu.edu/evaluation/pdf-ex/PAEX19.pdf>.

### **Workshops and Tours**

- **Evaluation Form** – On the evaluation forms that you distribute at the close of your workshop, have a question or two at the end, such as “Are you ready to try no-till farming? Why or why not?” or “How can we assist your municipality with implementing stormwater management BMPs?”
- **Track Your Participants** – Let the people in your workshop know you are going to call/email some of them in about a month (more or less as

- appropriate) to see if how they are doing with the information from the workshop. Then do it.
- **Sometimes it is all about the numbers.** Report the number of participants who enroll in your (targeted) programs as a result of your workshop/tour. Keep track of which new enrollees took your workshop/tour.
  - When encouraging participants to sign up for another program at your workshop, distribute forms in a not-the-usual color or marked in some other way (dot in the right bottom corner). Compare the number of forms that came from your workshop vs. the total number.
  - For a look at a more in-depth evaluation, check out this webpage: <http://www.extension.psu.edu/evaluation/pdf-ex/PAEX12.pdf>. You might get some ideas you can use.
  - Here are some questions one of our grantees suggested for use on their workshop evaluation survey:
    1. Has this conference influenced your decision to implement BMPs on your property? If so, what practices would you be interested in?
    2. What innovative agricultural practice you heard about today most interested you and why?
    3. How might this agricultural practice help your operation?
    4. What topics would you like to hear more about?
    5. Would you be interested in attending a conference like this annually?

### **Publications** (newspaper inserts, brochures, newsletters)

- **Response “Card”** – Maybe not at actual card, but a highlighted statement for people to get more information: district website address, phone number, or a mail-in form. Ask respondents what they plan to do – build a rain garden, join a watershed association, or stencil a storm drain, for example, as appropriate to your publication.
- **Track responses** – Keep track of the number of calls or website hits you get at the district office, both the month before your publication comes out and the month after. Keep track of what the calls are about.
- An in-depth evaluation of a newspaper column that could be useful to you: <http://www.extension.psu.edu/evaluation/pdf-ex/PAEX14.pdf>.

### **Websites**

- **Counters** – though it doesn’t tell you if people will implement a new behavior, it will let you know if people are checking your site.

- **Contact Us** – ask viewers to email the district if they will implement one new thing they found on the website that will help reduce pollution/improve water quality (have them identify the new action). This is a great way to get feedback about your website too – what information they found useful – or did not find on the website.
- **Question of the Week/Month** – Have viewers take an online survey of some question that is answered on your website. For example, “I use fertilizers on my lawn... a) not at all b) maybe once a year c) as the package directs d) at least once month” Then after they vote, show the survey results with an educational message about the subject. For a good example, see <http://cheapskatemonthly.com/> homepage.

Because behavior change is slow, we suggest that you consider evaluating behavior change even after the grant period. Documenting this change will help you show success and may give you a better chance to receive additional funding in the future.

If you would like more information about evaluation, here is a source that seems to fit our circumstances.

- ❖ PSU Cooperative Extension Program Evaluation  
<http://www.extension.psu.edu/evaluation/>

A simple evaluation, well-done and on target, can give you valuable information about the success level of your project. If you have any questions or other suggestions on how to evaluate projects, please contact Hannah Smith at [hannah-smith@pacd.org](mailto:hannah-smith@pacd.org) or 717-238-7223, extension 17.