Using an Evaluation for a Needs Assessment

When conducting an evaluation of a program, extension educators often want to use this opportunity to find out what the participants want to learn in *future* extension programs i.e., to conduct a limited needs assessment.

The Challenge

What kind of question is suitable for such a needs assessment? One approach would be to ask participants their level of knowledge or skill on topics not yet covered in an extension program. Although such a question is a good question, it may not be appreciated however, if you have already asked this kind of question to find out their level of knowledge or skill on topics covered in the program. Repeating the same kind of question could be tedious and cause participants to lose interest in completing the needs assessment question (Dillman, 2000).

A Solution

Consider this approach instead, asking participants the degree to which they need training on new topics. Use, for instance:

To plan for the future, circle the extent to which you would like additional training in each topic below.

TOPICS			
Biosecurity	NO TRAINING NEEDED	SOME TRAINING NEEDED	IN DEPTH TRAINING NEEDED
Business Management	NO TRAINING NEEDED	SOME TRAINING NEEDED	IN DEPTH TRAINING NEEDED
Communication Skills	NO TRAINING NEEDED	SOME TRAINING NEEDED	IN DEPTH TRAINING NEEDED
Feeding Strategies	NO TRAINING NEEDED	SOME TRAINING NEEDED	IN DEPTH TRAINING NEEDED
Forage Quality	NO TRAINING NEEDED	SOME TRAINING NEEDED	IN DEPTH TRAINING NEEDED

Positive features of this needs assessment question

- easy to complete
- focuses on the educator's dilemma, to provide training on a topic in future, or not
- a sensible measure to clientele – it has face validity
- can determine how strong the need is for each topic
- can be used on a web survey

Negative feature of this needs assessment question

- has only 3 categories and is therefore limited is how sensitive a measure it is. However, it is far more sensitive than if the extension educator asks the same question with only "no" and "yes" as the answer categories.

Tips in creating this needs assessment question

☐ Chose topics that are specific. For example, if the program is on leadership, use topics such as "use of task roles" or "use of maintenance roles".

Using specific topics will elicit useful and more reliable information for the educator.

☐ Keep this needs assessment question on an evaluation short! Limit the number of topics to 6-7 at most.

Resources

Dillman, D. A. (2000) Mail and Internet Surveys. 2nd edition New York:John Wiley
Kiernan, Nancy Ellen (2001). A Ranking Question for a Needs Assessment: Tipsheet #26, University Park, PA: Penn State Cooperative Extension. Available at: http://www.extension.psu.edu/evaluation/pdf/TS26.pdf

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The reference citation for this Tipsheet is: Kiernan, Nancy Ellen (2008). Using An Evaluation For A Need Assessment: Tipsheet #87, University Park, PA: Penn State Cooperative Extension.
Available at: http:// www.extension.psu.edu/evaluation/pdf/TS87.pdf

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