

# NATIONAL RESULTS OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE SURVEY

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COOPERATIVE  
EXTENSION'S  
CAPACITY  
TO SUPPORT  
PROGRAMS  
FOR  
CHILDREN,  
YOUTH  
AND  
FAMILIES  
AT  
RISK



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## PREFACE

As part of the Children, Youth and Families At Risk (CYFAR) Evaluation Collaboration, surveys of Extension professionals from 45 states and territories were conducted. This report contains survey results. It provides a snapshot of the state of Extension during late 1997 and early 1998 with regard to its organizational ability to support programming for children, youth and families at risk. Both national and state trends are reported, highlighting some states.

After a brief review of related literature, which provides an organizational context for the survey results and implications, the survey method is presented (survey design, procedure, data entry and analysis). The results are organized in the same manner as the state reports -- by the six components of organizational change as conceptualized in this initiative.

We would like to acknowledge the contributions of the thousands of individuals who completed this survey, the state coordinators who did all of the work to get the surveys out to their state Extension professionals, the state Extension directors who lent their administrative support and resources, and our federal partners at CSREES who supported this work. A special thank you to Aleta Garcia and Erik Earthman at the University of Arizona for their help in formatting and editing this report. We hope you will find this report of interest and use in your work.



# INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

## INTRODUCTION

The Children, Youth and Families At Risk National Initiative is the Cooperative Extension System's response to pervasive conditions in America which place children and their families at risk. Through the CYFAR Initiative, the Extension System makes a commitment to support programs for at-risk youth and families as part of the educational outreach of the Land Grant University system. The mission of the CYFAR Initiative is:

“The CES is committed to marshal the resources of the Land Grant and Cooperative Extension System to collaborate with other organizations to develop and deliver educational programs that equip limited resource families and youth who are at risk for not meeting basic human needs, to lead positive, productive, contributing lives.”

To accomplish this mission, organizational changes are necessary. The CYFAR Evaluation Collaboration has provided a means to help state Extension systems evaluate the current status of their organizations in this area and document future change through the use of the CYFAR Organizational Change Survey. This section gives a brief description of related literature and issues.

## RATIONALE FOR EVALUATION

It is important to acknowledge the difficulty of implementing organizational changes. The CYFAR Initiative involved a significant expansion of constituencies for Cooperative Extension nationally. It is said that while the Extension system continued to do an exemplary job of serving traditional constituencies, it also recognized changes that have taken place across the nation in both rural and urban areas in recent years by expanding efforts to reach children, youth and families who have not traditionally been served by Extension programs. Cooperative Extension had the knowledge base and the resources to make a significant difference in our communities, but needed to find more effective ways to expand to at-risk audiences, without abandoning more traditional clients. Everyone benefits when the social fabric of our communities remains strong and resilient. Ultimately, if the broader organizational changes have been effective, Extension professionals should feel better equipped and supported in carrying out the program-level goals of the CYFAR Initiative.



The six components of the organizational change outcome (listed below) were keyed to program strategies based on research on effective programs for at-risk children, youth and families (Program Announcement, Children, Youth and Families at Risk RFA Package, 1996).

1. DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT A COMMON VISION AND STRATEGIC PLAN FOR PROGRAMMING FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES AT RISK.
2. TRAIN, SUPPORT AND REWARD EXTENSION SALARIED AND VOLUNTEER STAFF FOR IMPLEMENTING PROGRAMS WHICH ACCOMPLISH THE CYFAR MISSION.
3. RECOGNIZE EXTENSION PROFESSIONALS AS CRITICAL RESOURCES IN RESEARCH AND EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY ISSUES.
4. PROMOTE DIVERSITY, INCLUSIVITY AND PLURALISM IN EXTENSION PROGRAMS AND STAFF.
5. PROMOTE [INTERNAL] COLLABORATIONS OF EXTENSION 4-H, FAMILY AND CONSUMER SCIENCE, AGRICULTURE, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, AND OTHER UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENTS IN PROGRAMMING FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES AT RISK ACROSS THE STATE.
6. PROMOTE AND JOIN [EXTERNAL] COLLABORATIONS OF COMMUNITY, COUNTY, STATE AND FEDERAL AGENCIES AND ORGANIZATIONS TO STRENGTHEN PROGRAMS AND POLICY FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES.

#### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The mission of Cooperative Extension is grounded in research and the dissemination of research-based knowledge; thus, it is appropriate to turn to the large body of literature on change in trying to assess the implementation and impact of these particular organizational changes. In addition to the contributions of standard works on program evaluation (Jacobs, 1988; King, Morris, & Fitz-Gibbon, 1987; Rossi & Freeman, 1993), the academic fields



of social psychology and sociology provide general theories of change in relation to individuals and groups, respectively. This work is relevant because system-wide changes in organizations depend in part on changes in the behavior of the individuals and groups within those systems. The unwillingness or inability to change by individual staff members constitutes a significant barrier to organizational change. Individuals also differ in their beliefs and attitudes about the possibility of change. Self-reported behaviors of staff members in community organizations are consistent with the beliefs they express about change, and it is not yet clear whether these beliefs in adults are malleable, or whether they are relatively stable personality traits (Silverberg, Betts, Huebner, & Cota-Robles, 1996). Other individual-level barriers to change can include habit, dependency, fear of the unknown, security and economic factors (Rennekamp & Gerhard, 1992).

At the group level, social exchange theory suggests that groups within an organization will respond to changes in terms of perceptions of power, advantage and disadvantage (Carnall, 1986). Group responses to change can be either passive or active, and may include resistance, opposition, acceptance, ritualistic response, acquiescence and leaving. Carnall (1986) suggests that organizations are effective in initiating change to the extent that advantages to some groups may be pursued without disadvantaging others.

The applied disciplines of management and public administration provide more specific guidance in both assessing organizational effectiveness (Harrison, 1987; Lawler, Nadler, & Cammann, 1980; Seashore, Lawler, Mirvis, & Cammann, 1983; Van de Ven & Ferry, 1980) and managing and evaluating organizational transitions (Beckhard & Harris, 1987; Legge, 1984; Luthy, 1993). Earlier interest in normative processes of organizational change and development (Beer, 1980; Burke, 1987) has more recently given rise to studies of "organizational learning" (Argyris & Schon, 1996; Leeuw, Rist, & Sonnichsen, 1994; Popper & Lipschitz, 1998; Simon, 1991). The extent to which an organization "learns" is thought to be related to both structural factors (mechanisms and procedures that allow organizations to systematically collect, disseminate, and use information) and cultural factors (including shared professional values, leadership, and vision). A related issue is the role of evaluation in organizational "learning." The process of conducting an evaluation can itself, under some circumstances, help to promote desired changes in organizational structure or culture (Fein, Staff, & Kobylenski, 1993; Forss, Cracknell, & Samset, 1994; Thompson, 1990).



In interpreting and evaluating the organizational changes in the Extension System in relation to the CYFAR Initiative, a particularly useful concept is the idea of an organizational niche. According to Zammuto (1982), the concept of organizational effectiveness is tied to the ideas of social and political legitimacy. Effectiveness is defined as "the degree to which an organization is satisfying broad sets of preferences for performance, as defined by the organization's constituencies" (p. 4). These constituent preferences, as well as social needs and constraints, are evolving, not static, so effective organizations are those that evolve along with the larger society. Over time, effective organizations satisfy constituent preferences through niche expansion, a process which may involve expansion to include new constituencies. Organizational evaluation models need to be flexible enough to provide management with enough information about these contextual changes to inform managerial decision making. There are public policy implications as well, since an organization that fails to recognize qualitative changes in public preferences will eventually lose public confidence and legitimacy.

Niche expansion seemed to be an accurate description of Cooperative Extension's position at the time of the CYFAR Initiative. The CYFAR Initiative and State Strengthening Projects reflected recognition by strategic planners of changes in the societal context that required some changes in the system, and in the ways that it is evaluated (Center for Assessment and Policy



Development, 1994; 4-H National Strategic Business Plan, 1991; Home Economics Sub-Committee, ECOP, 1990; Sadowske & Adrian, 1990; Search Institute, 1993; Strategic Directions of the Cooperative Extension System, 1990; Strategic Planning Council, ECOP, 1990). While the organization apparently continued to satisfy its traditional constituents, that constituency may be shrinking as a proportion of the U.S. population. Thus, a larger group was not yet benefitting fully from the resources of Cooperative Extension. To the extent that there was a mixed reception within the system to these changes, it may be partly due to the fact that

in some areas, the old niche was still a comfortable fit, while in others it was not. Such diversity of experience has added richness to the organization, but may also have complicated the process of developing and communicating a shared vision at all levels (horizontally and vertically) in the system.

The concept of niche is also relevant to discussions of collaboration both within and outside of the Extension system. Research in the area of inter- and intra-organizational relations provides valuable insight into the processes of internal and external collaboration. Alter and Hage (1995) hypothesize that inter-organizational collaboration varies along the dimensions of: 1) competition vs. symbiotic cooperation, 2) number of organizations involved, and 3) level of cooperation. When organizations compete directly for the same resources and clientele (that is, occupy the same niche or service sector), they are less likely to collaborate effectively than if they occupy more complementary or symbiotic niches. Organizational networks with many members find it more difficult to coordinate and cooperate than do networks of two or three members. Networks that involve exchanges of information, money or materials are simpler and require less coordination than networks that involve "joint production" of a product or service, which requires much more complex and higher level integration. While these hypotheses refer to inter-organizational collaboration efforts, it seems plausible that they could also apply to different departments or units within a large system such as Cooperative Extension. Alter and Hage (1995) suggest that a brief assessment of these network parameters is helpful in designing evaluations of inter- or intra-organizational relations, since this may help avoid setting unrealistic performance criteria. Based on this work, the Organizational Change Survey includes "performance gap" measures designed to tap into the gap between how effective the system is in actual practice, and how effective it could be given these constraints (Alter & Hage, 1995).



# METHOD

## SURVEY DESIGN AND PROCEDURE

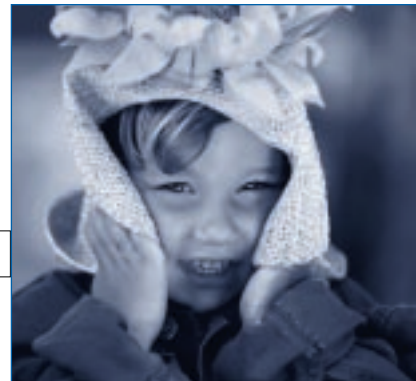
The Organizational Change Survey is loosely based on the national agent surveys conducted by the Search Institute in 1993 and 1996 to evaluate the National 4-H Council's Strengthening Our Capacity to Care (SOCC) Project. The SOCC surveys assessed the successes and challenges experienced in reaching youth and families at risk. The 74-item Organizational Change Survey covers topics ranging from the implementation of common vision to training opportunities, collaboration within and outside Extension, diversity of Extension programs and staff, respondent characteristics, and program sustainability. Issues of validity and reliability are covered in a separate section at the end of this report.

A packet containing a camera-ready copy of the Organizational Change Survey, implementation procedures and disk copies of supporting documents was sent to each state Extension director. Dillman's (1978) Total Design Method was utilized as a framework for this survey. Each state was responsible for selecting participants and implementing the survey. Eligible respondents included all paid Extension professionals who work directly or indirectly on issues related to children, youth and families. Individuals in nonpaid positions and Extension professionals who work primarily on other issues were excluded. All responses, identified only by code numbers, were returned to Arizona for analysis.

## DATA ENTRY AND ANALYSIS

Initial data entry was performed with the use of a computer software program that allows a scanner to read filled-in bubbles directly from a survey and convert them to numbers for statistical analysis. Each state's data were saved in a separate file. These files were then aggregated for statistical analyses for the national report. Thus, in the analyses, each state served as an individual case.

Within each component, an overall picture of the status of Extension is presented. In other words, national trends are discussed. A table is included for each component which displays the quartile ranges of state percentages, means, and standard deviations for various items. Those states in the top quartile in each area are then characterized. The top quartile refers to the top 25% of responses. The second and third quartiles refer to responses falling between the 51st-75th, and the 26th-50th percentages, respectively. The bottom quartile refers to the bottom 25% of responses. Please note that the section on Respondent Characteristics includes data at both the state and individual level of analysis. However, all data presented for Components 1 through 6 refer to states rather than individual respondents.



## OVERALL TRENDS: DISCREPANCIES BETWEEN CURRENT AND IDEAL

Prior to examining the results concerning the six components of organizational capacity, we think it is important to present the overall trends in the discrepancy between the current and ideal status of Extension. These powerful results emphasize the direction of the Extension system development as we work with children, youth and families at risk.

Fifty-five of the 74 survey questions addressed the six components. Of those 55, 34 were asked in such a way that respondents were required to answer twice, once for the current situation and once for the ideal. Discrepancy scores were then calculated for each of these 34 items by subtracting the response to the ideal item from the response to the current item. These discrepancy scores revealed the size and direction of the gap between a respondent's perception of the current and an ideal system.

When the Organizational Change Survey was constructed, the performance gap measures were included for several reasons. First, there was some feeling that some respondents wanted to do less work with children, youth and families at risk, not more. This discrepancy would be revealed. Second, not just the direction of the discrepancy, but the size of the gap would reveal how much work was to be done. Third, these measures were expected to provide a baseline from which progress toward the "ideal" could be measured when the survey is repeated. The results presented here are dramatic.



ALL state discrepancy scores in all 42 states, for ALL 34 items indicated that respondents want to do more, not less with this CYFAR Initiative. Further, in 20 of the 42 states, ALL discrepancy scores were not only in the desired direction, but all differences between the current and ideal scores were statistically significant. Respondents were quite definite in their opinions about how much more should be done:

- State Extension systems should articulate a clear vision for CYFAR;
- The state vision should be congruent with the national vision;
- States and individuals should work from strategic plans that address children, youth and families at risk;
- Supervisors should give support for allocation of time and resources;
- Campus-based faculty support is needed;
- More recognition and promotions for outstanding work are needed;
- Staff diversity is critical to the success of CYFAR efforts;
- More staff and volunteers need to be recruited from new audiences;
- Extension needs to work more with diverse populations; and
- More collaboration between Extension and both internal and external partners is needed.

Analysis of the discrepancy scores in the 22 states that had one or more scores that did not differ significantly revealed some interesting patterns. Only eight questions of the 34 possible were found to be involved. Four of them involved the discrepancy between the current and ideal work done with: 1) people from diverse ethnic backgrounds, 2) people from single-parent families, 3) people in low-income families, and 4) people at-risk for problem behavior. We speculate that so much work is currently being done with these populations that the size of the gap between current and ideal is smaller.

The question about the influence of outside groups on the CYFAR work of Extension did not produce significant differences between current and ideal in five states although the direction of all differences indicated more is desired. Three other questions produced similar results in one state each.

Please keep in mind, as you read this report and reflect on the meaning and implications of the results reported for each of the six components, that in all cases what respondents believed to be ideal revealed strong support for strengthening this system in working with children, youth and families at risk. Clearly, the results suggest a need to continue building support for community-based programs for at-risk audiences.



## CONCLUSIONS

An important part of the Children, Youth and Families At Risk Initiative involves empowering states and counties in their efforts to more effectively reach children, youth and families at risk. System-wide changes are expected to result in improved statewide capacity to support community-based programs for at-risk audiences. Three states are doing an exemplary job in demonstrating organizational capacity and support for this type of programming, as measured by this survey. Wisconsin consistently ranked in the top quartiles across the six components. Delaware and North Carolina ranked consistently in the top two quartiles.

While we acknowledge that these conclusions are based only upon survey data, the self-reported behaviors and beliefs of Extension staff in these states lead us to believe that they work in environments in which they know where they are headed and have a plan to get there. They receive good training, support and rewards. They are recognized as important resources in the community. Diversity is valued in their organizations, and they collaborate with internal and external partners.

Social exchange theory as applied to groups within an organization suggests that groups respond to change in terms of perceptions of power, advantage and disadvantage (Carnall, 1986). As measured by this survey, professional groups in Wisconsin, Delaware and North Carolina perceive that they are at an advantage in their systems for their willingness to work with at-risk audiences. As Extension has expanded its niche, these states appear to have responded in ways that have promoted the development of their professional staffs to support and be supported by the state organization.

Perhaps the most important result of this survey is the very positive picture of organizational learning that is taking place in Extension across all states. The mechanisms and procedures that give the organization structure and the shared professional values, leadership and vision that establish the organizational culture are all engaged in various degrees of change and learning. In every state, there was a gap between what the system is doing and what it should do. The discrepancies between the current and ideal status for all six organizational components reveal strong support for strengthening this system in working with children, youth and families at risk.



## SURVEY QUALITY: VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

When examining the results of an evaluation, it is always important to ask "How accurate is the information that was obtained?" Validity and reliability refer to the "quality" of your survey. The quality of the Organizational Change Survey is reflected in the variability and consistency in the data that allowed us to find meaningful patterns both within and across state Extension systems. For example, we were able to identify those state Extension systems doing consistently well working with children, youth and families at risk. We were also able to uncover strengths and weaknesses of the Extension system in serving at-risk populations. The following examines strategies adopted to increase the validity and reliability of the Organizational Change Survey information.

The assumption upon which the survey and report are based is that Extension will better support community-based programs for children, youth and families at risk when: personnel have a vision and plan for programming; staff and volunteers are trained, supported and rewarded appropriately; Extension professionals are viewed as critical resources in research and education; diversity, inclusivity and pluralism are valued; staff collaborate with their colleagues in Extension and the University; and also collaborate with others in the community, county, state and nation. These six organizational components, included in the State Strengthening request for applications, laid the foundation for Extension professionals' work as they carried out the program-level goals of the CYFAR Initiative.



Thus, our first concern around validity was to address the question "Are we measuring what we intend to measure?" In other words, will the information gathered from the Organizational Change Survey allow us to see how Extension is doing relative to the six organizational components? Several steps were followed to address this validity issue and other important issues such as whether the questions in the survey have only one interpretation (Cook & Campbell, 1976) and make conceptual sense (Patton, 1986). First, a list of questions adapted from the National 4-H Council's Strengthening Our Capacity to Care (SOCC) national survey was sent to the 15 members of the State Strengthening Organizational Work Group (SSOWG).

The members, representing eight universities, USDA/CSREES, local county Extension programs and the National 4-H Council, were asked to categorize the items according to the six organizational components, determine which items were essential and determine gaps in addressing each outcome. SSOWG members then met to reach consensus on the selected items as well as discuss survey methods and procedures. Following these meetings, a draft

of the survey was developed and sent out to the SSOWG for commentary and revision. The revised draft was then piloted with a small sample in Arizona. Finally, two members of the SSOWG were selected to provide feedback on the final survey items.

The question of validity was particularly critical for the national report because data from individuals was used to understand organizations. Thus, our level of measurement (the individual) is not the same as our level of analysis (Extension). This method can create a problem known as "the fallacy of the wrong level" (Rousseau, 1985). For example, the fallacy of the wrong level would occur if we used one Extension director's responses to represent the entire Extension system. This threat to validity was minimized by aggregating data across individuals, reducing potential individual biases. Particular attention was paid to examining the system rather than how the individuals were doing within the system at every step of the survey process (i.e., designing the survey, establishing validity, analyzing data and reporting results).

Another potential threat to validity in survey research is social desirability bias. This occurs when respondents "answer questions in a way that conforms to dominant belief patterns among groups to which the respondent feels some identification or allegiance" (Dillman, 1978, p.62). To minimize such bias, we worked to insure respondent confidentiality. Each state selected a contact person who assigned a code number to all those eligible to participate in the survey. Completed surveys with the appropriate codes, not the names of the respondents, were then sent directly to Arizona for analysis. Thus, at no time did any individual have access to both survey responses and names of the individuals corresponding to their code numbers. It is also important to note that surveys, as opposed to interviews, provide an additional level of anonymity, and therefore, generally produce the most honest responses (Hochstim, 1967; as cited in Dillman, 1978).

Nonresponse bias can also be problematic for survey research. Nonresponse bias occurs when those who do not respond to a survey differ greatly from those who do respond. If such a bias exists, then the results of the survey are misleading since they only represent those unique individuals who answered the survey and not the broader population initially targeted. One way to decrease nonresponse bias is to increase response rates. To accomplish this, we utilized Dillman's (1978) Total Design Method as a framework for developing and implementing surveys. Among other techniques, this method makes use of mailings which both inform potential respondents of forthcoming surveys and remind them to answer and send in the survey materials. This method yielded state



response rates from 70% to 99%, which meet established standards of "very good" response rates (Babbie, 1973; as cited in Edwards, Thomas, Rosenfeld, & Booth-Kewley, 1997).

One final problem arising from the aggregation of data is aggregation bias (Rousseau, 1985). Aggregation bias exists when relationships proposed by the data are simply an artifact of the way the data were combined. For example, higher correlations exist between groups selected from the same department on a particular variable than their individual-level counterparts. The current evaluation was able to minimize this problem by identifying a wide range of Extension employees as eligible respondents including community-based staff, agents, specialists and administrators. Thus, multiple and varied perspectives were examined instead of those from a single homogeneous group.



Reliability is concerned with issues of stability and consistency of results. A reliable survey will produce consistent results despite random fluctuations in the survey implementation process (e.g., changes in respondents' moods, time of day the survey was administered). Thus, a reliable survey insures that differences resulting from repeated administrations (if administered to the same population to measure the same characteristics) are due to real changes rather than due to error or random fluctuations.

While there are many ways to assess reliability, the type of reliability analysis appropriate for most survey data is called internal consistency reliability which estimates how consistently the items within a dimension (such as organizational status regarding diversity) measure the same characteristic (Edwards et al., 1997). Internal consistency reliability values can range from .00 to 1.00 with .70 or greater considered acceptable (Edwards et al., 1997).

Internal consistency reliability was less of an issue in this evaluation because we were interested in the responses to each item. However, within each component we also reported trends across conceptually linked items; thus, internal consistency reliabilities were calculated for these items. These analyses resulted in internal consistency values between .44 and .94. If you recall, values of .70 and higher are considered acceptable. The dimensions yielding the low values in this report were evaluation and policy and legislation. These values suggest that there is little relationship between the items "having knowledge of evaluation"

and "current involvement in evaluations." Similarly, there is little relationship between the items "having knowledge of policy and legislation affecting the lives of at-risk audiences" and "one role in Extension is to educate policymakers on such issues." Indeed, our discussions of quartile rankings alluded to such inconsistencies.

Given the practical nature of the current survey, it should be stressed that issues of validity and reliability are simply means to ends. The more valid question is "How is the information gathered from this survey going to be used?" Our interest in general trends rather than absolute percentages allowed us to better interpret implications of the results for both Extension and the communities we serve. Ultimately, it is the application of such information and openness to change that lie at the heart of Extension's ability to face the issues challenging children, youth and families in the years to come.



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