A Parable

A group of managers had set a goal to clear a dense jungle. They put focused all their efforts on doing this as efficiently and productively as possible. They hired workers, trained them on how to use machetes and other equipment, deployed them according to the most effective schedule, and supported their efforts. They were making great progress.

The organization’s leader got involved. He climbed the highest hill in the jungle and surveyed the work and looked at the landscape beyond. Then he shouted out to the workers and managers below, “Wrong Jungle!”

This story is from Steven Covey, “The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People.” It is related to the second habit, “Begin with the end in mind.” This is a story that highlights the difference between management and leadership. Management has a bottom-line focus: How can I best accomplish certain things? Leadership has a top-line focus: What are the things I want to accomplish?

Needs Assessment might be defined as determining how to apply your expertise, knowledge and skills to best serve the needs of your clientele. To determine this, information is needed. Information from clientele groups and other stakeholders about what is important to them. What are the most important problems they need to solve?

Focus Your Efforts

We all have fewer and fewer resources to work with, and these are mostly competitive resources. Yet the needs we have to address seem only to increase. How can we be successful? (1) We need to be successful in obtaining extramural resources to address the issues; wherever possible, we need to leverage university, state and Federal agency and local partner resources. (2) Because resources will always be limited, we need to prioritize all the needs and make strategic choices about the allocation of resources. Identification of needs and priorities should be the foundation of any Extension program, and since needs continually “change with the times,” it is an ongoing process.

Techniques for Documenting Stakeholder Needs

- Advisory groups (formal and informal; commodity groups; audience based)
- Listening to clients
- Focus groups
- Surveys
- Listening to colleagues (UA, discipline-based)
- Stakeholder documents generated through a priority-setting process (e.g., Pest Management Strategic Plan)
Four Trends in Competitive Federal Funding

Read any good RFA’s lately? Here are four major trends in competitive funding programs:

1. Regionalization of resources (e.g., funds dispersed through regional centers)
2. **Focus on stakeholder needs & involvement**
3. Integrated collaboration among partner organizations (leveraging)
4. Emphasis on evaluating outcomes and impacts

More and more federal grant applications require applicants to include *explicit citations* to document genuine stakeholder need, and some require that growers or other end-users are involved in developing and implementing the research project.

The good news is that these kinds of data can be generated in many ways on many levels; at client meetings and workshops, through surveys, at research conferences and symposia. Wherever a group of experts and end-users gather, there is an opportunity for documenting stakeholder needs and priorities. By producing formalized meeting notes or proceedings and posting these on the Web, you end up with document that can be cited in grant proposals to support the need for research in a given area.

For an example of this process, see the Arizona Pest Management Center website, where we documented a stakeholder priority-setting process during the 2006 APMC Summit. [http://cals.arizona.edu/apmc/Summit.html](http://cals.arizona.edu/apmc/Summit.html)

**Steps in Program Development and Delivery**

1. Identify critical needs to focus your efforts
2. Develop funding to support the program (research and outreach)
3. Conduct research (primary or secondary)
4. Develop the program
5. Deliver the program
6. Assess the program and program delivery
   a. For client satisfaction and improvement
   b. To document outcomes and impact (note the difference)
7. Go back to step one

Start with the end in mind. What does that end look like? Ask your clients!