



USDA-CSREES 2007 National Water Quality Conference

Using Needs Assessment to Examine Extension Program Effectiveness in Addressing Water Resource Education

In 2004 and 2005 the Montana State University Extension Water Quality Program (MSUEWQ) performed several formal and informal needs assessments in an effort to identify and assess program clientele educational needs and evaluate impacts of some existing educational programs. Various instruments and tools were implemented in this effort, both specifically to evaluate overall extension education needs within Montana and the CSREES Northern Plains and Rocky Mountain region as well as assess the performance of specific programs. Information gathered from these assessment efforts have led the MSUEWQ team toward a conscious decision to focus their extension education efforts toward the specific needs and wants of their clientele, thus changing the direction and approach of some existing educational delivery mechanisms in terms of style, venue, and medium that the program's clientele prefer. Along with better outreach and education practices, the program has also performed intensive impact assessments on successful water resource educational products and programs offered by MSUEWQ. By tailoring best educational practices in new programs, MSUEWQ has built a more effective and informative educational network within their program. Likewise, by implementing more rigorous impact assessments of past programs the MSUEWQ has addressed accountability issues associated with educating their clientele on valuable and necessary water resource issues throughout the state. These practices serve as excellent examples and models for similar programs both regionally and on the national level.

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