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Nancy K. Franz

Iowa State University, nfranz@iastate.edu

Margaret Van Ginkel

Iowa State University, vangin@iastate.edu

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Determining and Sharing the Public Value of FCS Telling the Story

Abstract

Those of us working with publically funded family and consumer sciences (FCS) programs have a dream that we are valued, our work is sustainable, we make a difference in people's lives, and we are recognized for the public value we provide. However, current political forces make this dream a challenge. This article describes a much-needed public value movement for FCS and how to determine and share our public value.

Keywords

Human Sciences Extension and Outreach, School of Education

Disciplines

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Comments

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Determining and Sharing the Public Value of FCS: Telling the Story

NANCY K. FRANZ
MARGARET VAN GINKEL

Those of us working with publically funded family and consumer sciences (FCS) programs have a dream that we are valued, our work is sustainable, we make a difference in people's lives, and we are recognized for the public value we provide. However, current political forces make this dream a challenge. This article describes a much-needed public value movement for FCS and how to determine and share our public value.

Our culture demands proof of value of FCS.

FCS leaders and those responsible for programs have discovered the need to more fully evaluate and share the public value of our work in order to respond to the increased focus on accountability, return on investment (ROI), and evidence-based outcomes; our culture demands proof of value. Public decision-makers' perceptions of FCS programs and their impact matter immensely because the use of public funds is questioned and sometimes those funds are reduced. In response, FCS needs to engage more in the story-telling movement to help show value and to stem the decline of support for our work.

Nancy K. Franz, PhD (nfranz@iastate.edu) is Associate Dean for Extension and Outreach to Families and 4-H Youth and she is Director, Iowa State University Extension to Families, Iowa State University, in Ames, IA; **Margaret Van Ginkel** is Hotlines Coordinator and Families Finance Specialist, Iowa State University Extension, Iowa State University, in Urbandale, IA.

FCS needs to engage more in the story-telling movement to help show value and to stem the decline of support for our work.

Public value has been defined as, "The value of a program to those who do not directly benefit from the program" (Kalambokidis & Bipes, 2007, p. 12). Kalambokidis (2004) promotes four public values: (a) narrowing an information gap, (b) fairness or justice of resource distributions, (c) reducing costs or increasing benefits for stakeholders, and (d) public good. This differs from private value or gains for our work for individuals and families (see Table 1).

What should FCS leaders and practitioners do to determine and share public value stories? We suggest several steps:

- Create the case, urgency, and capacity for FCS public value storytelling across the profession
- Help coworkers and stakeholders understand the differences between the public and private value of FCS programs
- Move from embracing the private value to embracing the public value of FCS programs
- Identify and prioritize the public values (see the four presented above) for FCS programs
- Develop public value stories for high priority public values consistent with the prioritized list

Table 1. Comparing FCS Private and Public Value

PRIVATE VALUE	PUBLIC VALUE
Improved personal health from increased intake of fruits and vegetables	Decreased healthcare costs
Improved personal parenting skills	Decreased juvenile crime
Reduction of individual or family debt	Decreased dependence on public assistance due to fewer bankruptcies
	Reduced student loans delinquency
Reduce energy and water use due to installation of home water saving devices/appliances	Decreased municipal infrastructure costs
	Fewer brownouts or blackouts
Improved personal life and leadership skills	Increased civic leadership

- Share the public value stories internally and externally
- Make public value storytelling the norm for FCS

The most challenging step in this process is developing the public value story based on a public view driven by credible evidence.

Developing Stories

The first step includes mapping the FCS programs that lead to a particular public value using a logic model (University of Wisconsin Extension, 2011), concept mapping (Concept map, 2011), or other process such as a simple text document covering program relevance, inputs, outputs, outcomes, assumptions, and external factors. Second, determine the parts of the model/map where data are to be gathered to show public value. Third, collect and analyze the data for public value. Finally, write or depict a public value story that describes the relevance of the program (what public value is addressed?), the educational activities or response (what was done?), and the results of the program that contribute to public value (Virginia Cooperative Extension, 2010). The story then needs to be told and retold until policymakers and stakeholders hear it.

For example, you and your colleagues may decide the most important public value your program addresses is to decrease healthcare costs (reducing costs). Relevance for that program most likely would include local statistics on the rate of obesity for your audience and the related health-

care costs. The response might describe the youth nutrition education program you conducted. The results might show the percentages of participants who after the program, 6 months later, and 1 year later increased their intake of fruits and vegetables, decreased intake of soda, and decreased their body mass index. The changed actions and behaviors then need to be translated into specific health-care cost savings.

Specific details on developing FCS public value stories are available (Boyer et al., 2009). The FCS profession needs to more fully and adeptly embrace the public value movement to sustain our ability to improve the lives of individuals, families, and communities. These steps and tips are one way to help us move in this direction.

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