

Build Program Capacity with Volunteers

Utilize the Developmental Stages of an Extension Professional

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Background

Achieving the Extension Mission Through Volunteers (AEMTV) is an online cohort course for novice and experienced professionals who work with volunteers to enhance and deliver Extension Programs. The course was designed to build professional and organizational capacity in volunteer management and development.

- Content experts identified three areas of research which provided the course framework:
1. The Identification, Selection, Orientation, Training, Utilization Recognition, Evaluation (ISOTURE) Model (Boyce, 1971; Dolan, 1969).
 2. The Developmental Stages of an Extension Professional (DSEP) Model (Rutledge, 2021).
 3. Communicating the Public Value of Extension Programs to Stakeholders (Franz, 2015; Kalambokidis, 2004).

Purpose

The purpose of this research study was to document the DSEP (Rutledge, 2021) model knowledge gained by individuals and assess to what extent participants applied the DSEP model to shift their practices in working with volunteer systems.

Methodology

- Retrospective pretest-posttest design to measure the AEMTV course participants' understanding and application of the DSEP (Rutledge, 2008) stages.
- The analysis resulting in 127 respondents (41% response rate) from 17 states (see Table 1).
- The majority of respondents (54%) had five or less years of Extension experience.

Table 1. Covariates / Demographic Information (N = 127)

Gender	n	%
Female	91	72
Male	18	12
Preferred not to respond	20	16

Race / Ethnicity	n	%
American Indian / Alaska Native	1	1
Black / African American	2	2
White	101	79
Preferred not to respond	12	18

Program Area	n	%
4-H Youth Development	85	67
Agriculture (Master Gardeners, etc.)	24	19
Family Living / Health & Well Being / Human Development	6	5
Natural Resources	2	1
No Response	10	8

Data Analysis

We used the Creswell and Plano Clark's (2017) mixed methods triangulation design for the evaluation. This type of design compares and contrasts quantitative and qualitative results and then interprets the two together. Creswell noted this type of design is "used when a researcher wants to directly compare and contrast quantitative statistical results with qualitative findings or to validate or expand quantitative results with qualitative data." (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017, p. 62).

Results

Quantitative and qualitative data was captured to help us understand these four areas:

- Knowledge gained (Cronbach's alpha = 0.910)
- Behavior change (Cronbach's alpha = 0.736)

Results are displayed in Tables 2 and 3.



Volunteer Delivery System



Developing, Implementing and Reviewing the Infrastructure to Support a Volunteer Delivery System

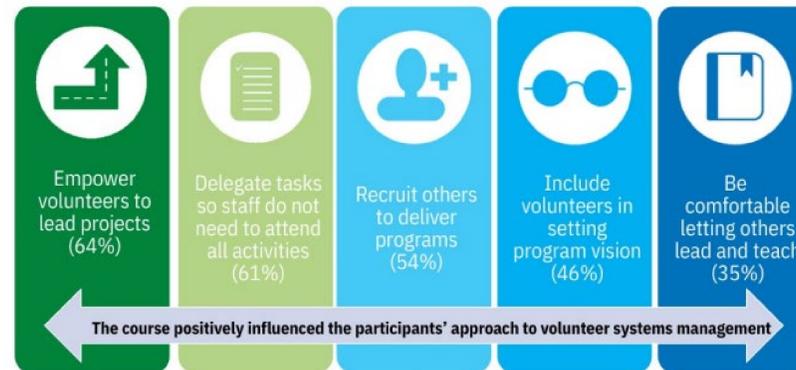


Table 2. Application and Behavior Change of Respondent (N = 127)

Survey Question	Before		After		Mean Difference	t	d	DSEP Model Stage
	% Strongly Agree / Agree	Mean Score	% Strongly Agree / Agree	Mean Score				
I delegate tasks to volunteers so I don't have to be at every event/activity	61	2.64	96	3.38	0.73	12.28***	1.20	Management
I empower volunteers to take the lead on projects that interest them	81	2.91	100	3.61	0.70	13.57***	1.36	Leadership Management
I recruit others to deliver programs	68	2.72	95	3.32	0.61	10.81***	0.71	Management
I include volunteers in settings the vision for the program	76	2.86	95	3.36	0.50	9.42***	0.87	Leadership
I am comfortable letting others teach volunteers	72	2.82	90	3.19	0.37	7.84***	0.55	Education Management
Most aspects of the program are my responsibility	80	2.96	58	2.61	-0.35	-6.27***	0.51	Service

***p <.001, tested at 95% confidence level.

"I have allowed myself to back off when a volunteer clearly has more expertise and leadership to run an event. It has been great to sit back and let them excel and feel the success. I do not always have to be in charge of everything."
- Vermont

"Now, I give myself permission to step back to allow others to lead. I used to feel guilty because I thought it was my job alone to lead."
- North Dakota

Acknowledgements

This work represents the publication of a model developed by Dr. James Rutledge as a result of 40 years of Extension field research. We had the opportunity to work with Jim over the past 15 years as he presented the model in the North Central Region and nationally.

Table 3. Volunteer Engagement Shifts in Programs Extension Professionals Lead (N = 127)

Survey Question	Before		After		Mean Difference	t	d	DSEP Model Stage
	% Strongly Agree / Agree	Mean Score	% Strongly Agree / Agree	Mean Score				
Volunteers are involved in dialogue or decisions about the leadership of the program	72.4	2.78	93.7	3.24	0.46	8.75***	0.76	Leadership
Volunteers are given responsibility by Extension professionals to lead or teach programs	74.0	2.85	95.2	3.29	0.43	8.33***	0.76	Management
Volunteers have responsibility for major parts of the program	63.7	2.67	83.5	3.09	0.41	7.25***	0.67	Leadership
Volunteers perform nearly any role that an Extension professional would perform	16.6	1.93	39.4	2.32	0.38	7.18***	0.64	Leadership
Volunteers mostly teach and contribute only what is taught to them by Extension professionals	35.5	2.32	34.7	2.31	-0.01	0.16	0.0	Education

***p <.001, tested at 95% confidence level.

Limitations

When course participants self-report, they use their perceptions at the point of evaluation. They may be under- or over-reporting their knowledge gained and behavior changed (Donaldson & Grant-Vallone, 2002).

Discussion and Implications

This evaluative study confirms the DSEP model, prepares professionals across disciplines to work with volunteers to implement and expand Extension programs. Application of this model strengthens volunteer systems, builds program capacity with volunteers, and increases professionals' productivity.

Rutledge's framework intentionally engages professionals to strengthen Extension programming with volunteers through the DSEP model. This research is the first formal evaluation of the DSEP model which documents the utilization and statistical significance with AEMTV course participants.

Stages of Professional Development: The Matrix	The Developmental Stages of an Extension Professional (DSEP) and how they affect your relationship with volunteers. (As with all developmental stages, transitions between stages often include overlapping indicators.)			
Developmental Stage	Extension Professional's Role	Extension Professional's View of Volunteers	Functions of the Volunteers	Capacity of the Educational System
Service	Servant Doing things for the program and volunteers. Not willing to share responsibilities with others.	Recipient Professional does things for the volunteers.	Recipient Volunteers are not involved in any meaningful dialog about the leadership of the program.	Very Limited The growth of the program is dependent on the professional's energy and interests.
Education	Teacher Teaching volunteers those things the professional feels confident to teach to others.	Learner The volunteer's role is to learn what the professional teaches.	Learner Volunteers become an extension of the professional, teaching only what the educator has taught them.	Limited to professional and select volunteers Program capacity is still limited to the interests and energy of the educator.
Management	Manager Professional/Specialist facilitates the involvement of others in providing programs and begins to recruit others with talents other than their own.	Volunteer Staff Volunteers are perceived as working "on behalf" of the organization.	Teacher The volunteer's role is to conform to the professional's view of the program. Volunteers are given responsibility to lead programs outside the professional's area of expertise.	Expanded Opportunities The program can grow based on the professional's skills and any volunteers they recruit. Because the professional is recruiting outside of their own comfort zone, the capacity is greatly increased.
Leadership	Leader The role of the professional is to see the big picture and set the vision for the organization. The professional facilitates the empowerment of anyone that can contribute to the future success of the program.	Partner Volunteers are seen as key resources to achieve the vision that they create together. Volunteers are valued for what they can contribute to the vision.	Middle Manager Volunteers perform nearly any role that a professional would perform as long as it is consistent with the agreed upon vision. Volunteers take responsibility for major parts of the program.	Unlimited Opportunities The capacity of the program is limited only by the number of people that can be energized by the vision and empowered to act on behalf of the organization.

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