

# IMPACT



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## Using a Needs Assessment Survey for Planning in Southeastern Idaho

### *The Situation*

In the fall of 1994, extension educators in four Southeastern Idaho counties (Bear Lake, Caribou, Franklin and Oneida) formed an extension cluster team. The Bear River Basin Cluster was a self-directed team of faculty and staff designed to meet the present and future needs of community members by providing up-to-date, in-depth information in a timely manner. The challenge however was to accurately assess community needs. The traditional method of having a county advisory committee was no longer working due to lack of participation.

### *Our Response*

In 2001, a needs assessment survey from Utah State University was adapted for the Bear River Basin Cluster. A stratified random sample of 1600 households was drawn by county boundaries, 400 households from each of the four counties. A press release, printed in local newspapers, announced the survey and requested participation. A letter, survey, and self-addressed stamped envelope were sent to the selected households. Next, a postcard reminder and later a second letter, survey, and self-addressed stamped envelope were sent to those that did not return surveys. Data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS Version 9.0 for Windows, 1998) for frequencies and percentages.

### *Program Outcomes*

The needs assessment survey reached beyond the traditional audiences of the University of Idaho Extension to provide a more accurate assessment of

community needs. The projected importance of personal and family issues brought to light by the needs assessment were invaluable programming tools. Specific results follow.

Table 1. Youth and Youth Mentoring Issues

Issues	Frequency (Percentage)
Drug abuse prevention	542 (77%)
Violence prevention	517 (73%)
Adult's ability and willingness to nurture and guide youth	482 (68%)
Ability to reason and make responsible choices	454 (64%)
Community activities	447 (63%)
Character-building and life skills	420 (60%)

Table 2. Family and Consumer Sciences Issues

Issues	Frequency (Percentage)
Healthy diets, sound health practices	481 (68%)
Strong families, sound parenting	475 (67%)
Food safety and preservation	462 (66%)
Consumers/family financial management	412 (58%)
Safe/affordable options for elder care	402 (57%)
Safe/affordable options for child care	293 (42%)

Table 3. Agriculture and Natural Resource Issues

<b>Issues</b>	<b>Frequency (Percentage)</b>
Water resources/water resource management	574 (81%)
Energy conservation	560 (79%)
Population pressure on natural resources and communities	407 (58%)
Population pressure on agricultural lands; land use planning/management	379 (54%)
Management of small acreage crops, livestock, and horticulture	336 (48%)
Farm and ranch profitability/sustainability	316 (45%)

Table 4. Civic and Business Issues

<b>Issues</b>	<b>Frequency (Percentage)</b>
Accessing adequate and affordable healthcare	593 (84%)
Securing and maintaining an adequate job and income	465 (66%)
Retaining and expanding businesses in my community	421 (60%)
Addressing mutual concerns and issues	368 (52%)
Alternative sources for additional income	367 (52%)
Securing adequate and affordable housing	336 (48%)

The majority of the issues were ones that were identified as important were already being covered by existing Bear River Basin programming, such as healthy diets, sound health practices, and food safety and preservation. In these instances, the needs assessment showed that programming was on the right track, and this programming was continued. However, there were some issues identified that were not being covered in the existing programming, such as financial management. Because the cluster became aware of the need for programming on these issues, some programming areas were changed to include these subjects. The needs assessment also revealed that respondents were interested in a county

University of Idaho Extension website. Franklin County developed and currently runs a website due to the responses to the needs assessment.

Information from the needs assessment was shared with community leaders and other organizations because UI Extension programming could not cover all of the issues. Another positive result of the Bear River Basin Cluster Needs Assessment Survey was that UI Extension administrators realized the benefit of using a survey to direct programming needs. In 2004, a statewide needs assessment survey was completed by the University of Idaho Extension.

#### **Other Contributing Faculty**

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### ***For More Information***

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