

Common Errors Made in Writing Success Stories

- 1. No impact reported** – only a description of activity.
Every success story should report the results of the program, not just why and how it was conducted. The “so what” of programming efforts needs to be conveyed.
- 2. Impact of activity reported was very small** (i.e. The amount saved by program participants was \$35.00 when four 4-Hers learned to sew shorts, or 15 Homemakers saved \$6.00 per member by making a glass bottomed basket.)
- 3. Did not use the official organizational name** of the “Cooperative Extension Service.” Used Extension Office, Extension, Coop Extension, Extension Service, CES, 4-H, and/or Homemakers instead of the official name. The Extension Office cannot carry out a program. The official name must be used.
- 4. Dollars reported are not focused on the intended outcome of a program.** Example: “The youth livestock program was directed by 10 leaders volunteering 20 hours each and at a value of \$17.15 per hour, that totaled a value of \$3,430.00 to the community.” Or, “The youth livestock program reported an increase of \$0.25 per pound for the grand champion steer at the county fair livestock sale this year.” The intended outcome should be focused on youth development and how individuals changed.
- 5. Length of statement**
Too long – $\frac{3}{4}$ of a page is too long to get people to read
Too short – a three sentence statement is too short to tell the story
- 6. Repeating the same program year after year.** We have some successful programs that become annual events, but people remember.
- 7. Gave more credit to other organizations and agencies** we collaborated with than to ourselves (i.e. Listed them first in write up, gave them primary credit because they contributed a grant.).
- 8. No mention of the county name.** Success Stories need to be able to stand alone (i.e. A member of congress wants to know that this happened in one of their counties.).
- 9. Success Stories need to be stated in past tense.** We are describing accomplishments of programs that have already occurred.
- 10. The statement should not be stated in the first person.** They are not “my” 4-Hers or a program that “we” conducted.
- 11. Do not use acronyms** or program names that only we, you, or a few people may know, at least without some explanation. Write out what acronyms mean. Not everyone knows all of these, for example: NAPES, BMPs, NRCS, IPM, EFNEP, IRM, SEEC, KOSA, Reality Store,

and LEAP for Health. Do not use personal names of adults or youth – these are public records.

12. Trying to report impact too early or more impact than a single activity can produce.

Many individual activities will not generate evidence of impact beyond an increase in knowledge. Programs will not generate measurable impact without follow up contact with participants.

13. Failed to look for creative and innovative programs that had a significant outcome with a segment of the population that is identifiable. Programs like Reality Store, Homemaker Bazaar or Annual Meeting, the Annual Tobacco Meeting, how much money was given away by the Phase 1 Committee are reported over and over again and are not indicators of Impact.

Revised October 2015 by Tanya C. Dvorak, Ph.D., Senior Extension Specialist, Program and Staff Development, University of Kentucky.