

# The Program Development Process

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Putting knowledge to work is the business of the Cooperative Extension System. With a network of university-affiliated staff in more than 3000 counties across the country, Cooperative Extension plays a key role in focusing the resources of America's land grant universities on local needs and issues. Because of this "grass roots" orientation, the accomplishments of Cooperative Extension are many and varied.

But Cooperative Extension's most significant accomplishments are not the result of random actions and events. Rather, they are a product the deliberate planning, disciplined implementation, and systematic evaluation of educational **programs** which meet the needs of local citizens.

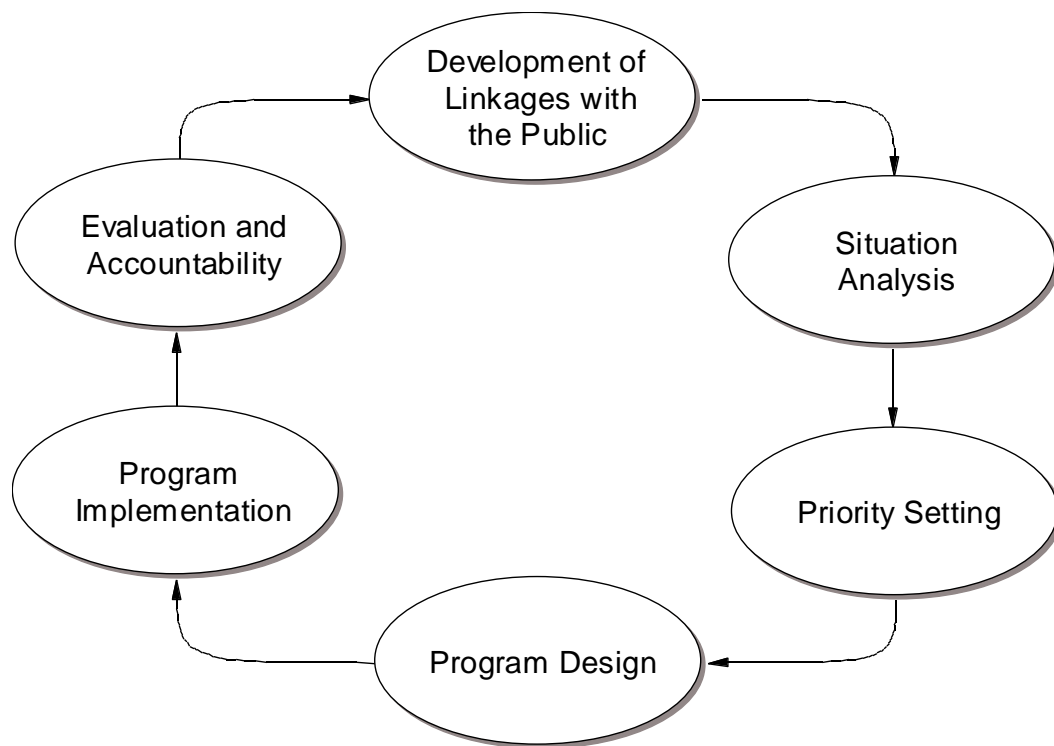
Extension programs are created through a process called **program development**. Program development is defined as **a deliberate process through which Extension engages representatives of the public in planning, implementing and evaluating plans of action for addressing needs and issues they have helped to identify.**

Program development occurs at all levels of the Cooperative Extension System, however, the focus of this series of publications is on developing county-level programs in partnership with local citizens.

Kentucky Cooperative Extension uses a program development process made up of six distinct but interrelated phases. The six phases of the process are linked together in a circular pattern as depicted in the illustration on the following page.

## Phases of the Process

The process begins with an organization's efforts to **develop linkages with the public**. If Cooperative Extension is to remain a relevant force in addressing local needs, county Extension staff must build and maintain relationships with representatives of the community it is charged to serve. A strong County Extension Council is a critical part of these efforts to link the organization to the people.



Next, county Extension staff work in partnership with members of the County Extension Council to conduct a **situation analysis** that reveals needs and issues of public concern. Data collection techniques useful in situation analysis include community forums, focus groups, key informant interviews, media scans, and a review of existing data.

Then, the County Extension Council reviews the data that has been collected and generates a list of programming opportunities. **Priority setting** techniques are used to select those which should become targets of local Extension programs.

In the **program design** phase, a program plan is developed for each high priority program thrust. A program plan (or plan of work) specifies how purposefully selected learning experiences will produce a set of valued outcomes for an individual, group, or society.

Next, actions are carried out in accordance with the plans. In the **program implementation** phase, resources necessary for conducting the program are acquired and deployed. Volunteers are trained and mobilized. Learning experiences, activities, and other events are conducted.

The final phase of the cycle, **evaluation and accountability**, involves making judgments regarding the quality, value, or worth of a program and communicating those judgments to relevant decision makers. Such a commitment to accountability further strengthens Extension's linkage to the people.

*Revised 2007 by Charlene Jacobs, Martha Nall, Chuck Stamper, Jeanne Davis, Ralph Prince and John Mowbray as a part of the 2008-12 County Plan of Work Development Process*