



extension
IMPACTS

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—*Institute participant*

EVOLVE leadership institute survey shows strong impact

Situation:

Strong leaders are the foundation of sustainable rural communities and form a base for economic and community development. Attempts have been made to measure the impact of EVOLVE (Extension Volunteer Organization for Leadership, Vitality, and Enterprise) in Wyoming through a study of participants one year after graduation. The team developed a survey specific to the EVOLVE program. The survey included three themes: leadership in personal skill building and confidence, leadership in community involvement, and leadership in commitment to community building.

In early 2008, 83 EVOLVE graduates from six community leadership institutes in Wyoming completed a survey reflecting their perceptions of the institutes. In Park County, 17 of 24 graduates completed the survey. The results produced the kind of information needed to justify continued leadership development.

Impacts:

Leadership in Personal Skill Building and Confidence:

More than 90 percent (75 respondents) reported they were more aware of their strengths and weaknesses. In fact, respondents reported they agreed leadership behavior improved in all areas listed.

When asked if their comfort level had increased or decreased in certain behaviors due to their participation in the institutes, the largest percentage (83.9 percent or 68 respondents) indicated the greatest increase in comfort level was in “accepting ideas different from my own.”

Leadership in Community Involvement:

The question was asked, “Has your overall involvement in the community strengthened (in quality or quantity) through participation in the Institute?” Fifty-six respondents (69.1 percent) agreed or strongly agreed. One quarter (25.9 percent) were neutral on this question, and four individuals disagreed their community involvement had strengthened.

Leadership in Commitment to Community Building:

Respondents were asked to estimate the number of leadership roles they were involved in **before** and **after** participation in the leadership institutes. Prior to the institute, the greatest number of participants (48 respondents) indicated one to two leadership roles. After participation, the largest number of respondents (38) reported three to four leadership roles compared to 19 respondents who reported the same number prior to institute participation. There was also a doubling in the number who reported participating in five to six leadership roles after the institute.

Before participation in the institutes, 57 respondents (73 percent) estimated volunteering for two or less organizations. After attending the institutes, the number dropped to 40 (51 percent). Conversely, those reporting volunteering for three or more organizations before institute participation were 21 respondents, or 27 percent. But after attending an institute, that number rose to 38 respondents or 49 percent of the institute participants.

Survey respondents were asked, "On average, how many hours per month were, and are you now, volunteering?" The answers revealed a marked increase in volunteerism after institute participation. More than half (54.4 percent) estimated spending five hours or less volunteering before the institute. This number dropped to approximately 28 percent after the institute, and respondents estimated a total of 586 hours in volunteer participation prior to the institute. After institute participation, the estimated hours of volunteering increased to 890 hours – an increase of 304 hours.

EVOLVE programs utilize an adult learning philosophy of "learn, act, do" and include core components designed to "learn" skills and build relationships as well as opportunities to "act" on and practice the skills during the course. What people did after graduation as a result of the institute is represented by these statements:

- *I have confidently exposed myself to community challenges and experiences.*
- *I include additional people in projects.*
- *I am more involved on organized boards.*
- *The institute was definitely a catalyst for my decision to return to the nonprofit world. I just feel better overall doing something that impacts people versus a bottom line.*
- *Before the institute, I felt intimidated by others who were actively involved in the community. Now I do not feel unequal to them and enjoy talking and relating to their abilities.*
- *I'm not afraid to express my viewpoint but do so now in a more non-confrontational style.*

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