

# An Introduction to The Impact Indicators Tips Booklet



Practical and Credible Methods to Document Extension Community Development Impacts

## Impact Indicators: What are these?

*“Is Extension making a difference?”  
“If so, how much?”*

Impact indicators provide a clear concise means of addressing these questions.

**“Over \$283M of Impacts and  
12,897 Jobs Created or Saved.”**

*“What is the impact of Extension’s  
Community Development (CD) programs?”  
In 2014, the answer for 12 North Central  
States is summarized above.*

Source: Extension Community Development Impacts, 2014

In 2010, twelve North Central Region States successfully aggregated their Community Development (CD) impact data around a set of common indicators, with evidence from program participants that the impacts were indeed accurately reflected. The above summary comes from a matrix that provides numerical results on 16 indicators for each of the 12 states.

## Is that all there is? A matrix of numbers?

No. *Anecdotes* about the indicators accompany these but the data are the key building blocks. Examples are available at: [goo.gl/UxNwzs](http://goo.gl/UxNwzs)



*Are you being pressured from every side to provide more evidence that your Extension efforts make a difference?*



*Are you responsible for more and more programming with fewer and fewer Extension colleagues, making it really tough to do any evaluations?*



*Is there too much uncertainty about what is expected in impact indicators to make it worth spending time on?*



*Is there confusion on how to use the “but for” attribution principle, which is the recommended means of identifying impacts?*

As an Extension educator or state specialist, you may have questions about impact indicators like these. We had these too and they led us to do a pilot effort on indicators. We share the tips we learned in the “**Impact Indicators Tips Booklet.**” This brochure provides an introduction to the 40-page booklet, which is freely available at:

[aese.psu.edu/nercrd/impacts](http://aese.psu.edu/nercrd/impacts).



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## What are the benefits to me and my programs if I report these?

There are **seven** benefits to you as an educator for collecting and reporting these indicators.

**1** Your program is likely to receive greater funding, making it possible to reach more people or more communities.

Both public and private funders like to back programs that have a proven track record of making a difference, so investing time in these can help you expand resources to reach more people. As we learned from a recent survey, 86 percent of CD educators in Iowa and Missouri named this a benefit of indicators.<sup>1</sup> The following graphic illustrates these connections.



We (Extension educators) deliver programs, which have impacts – but with delays. We go back and check (in person, by phone or by survey) and then report the impacts. To secure more of these impacts, public and private funders provide funding to pay staff, who deliver more programs and around we go!

**2** You are more likely to get raises if your programs are seen as successful. The indicators can help you demonstrate this.

Seventy-five percent of the CD educators in Iowa and Missouri reported the indicators were valuable in their personal promotion materials.

**3** If you make small adjustments in your program to facilitate impact indicator collection later, it engages the community more fully, builds more stakeholder support and leads to greater impacts.

Almost four in five (79 percent) of the educators reported that the indicators helped them build stakeholder support.

**4** Your Extension programming will improve, via feedback on what works and what doesn't.

Eighty-six percent of the CD educators surveyed used the indicators to help them improve their programs.

**5** The indicators help to justify participation fees as well as time costs of the Extension program.

More than half of the educators reported that they used the indicators to justify program fees.

**6** The indicator results are helpful when applying for grants.

Likewise, more than half of the educators used indicator results in their grant applications.

**7** As you participate with others from other states striving to report indicators, this will enrich everyone's ability to show that Extension makes a difference.

This benefit happens as educators trade ideas via journal articles, webinars, and conferences on their successes and challenges in using indicators. There is a National CRED Indicators Work Group that meets monthly to exchange ideas and develop educational materials. Check out their webinars at:

[goo.gl/UwW20H](https://goo.gl/UwW20H)

<sup>1</sup> George Morse conducted an online survey of 41 Extension field educators in Iowa and Missouri who specialized in community development and had worked with CD impact indicators in August 2015. The response rate was 68 percent.

## Still uncertain if benefits outweigh costs?

We haven't talked about the costs of collecting and reporting impact indicators, so we aren't surprised. But first, for a really fun and informative webinar on the benefits of indicators that approaches it a bit differently than we do, see "The Importance of Collecting Impact Numbers to Promote Community Development Work," by Scott Loveridge and Brent Elrod (available at: [goo.gl/UwW20H](http://goo.gl/UwW20H)).

## What are some clear, practical guidelines for collecting credible impact indicators?

We, together with others in the Northeast region, had the same question in 2015. Frankly, while we saw the necessity of reporting impact indicators, we were skeptical about them. Were they credible? Were there practical approaches that we could fit into our busy schedules?

To explore this we formed a learning circle where the members studied the methods used in the North Central and Southern regions and then did pilot projects on six of our programs to test drive these approaches. In the process we learned a lot from the other regions and a lot from our experience.





<i>Impacts: Long-term Changes in Economic, Social or Environmental Conditions in Franklin, NH</i>		
<b>28</b>	Number of participants reporting new leadership roles and opportunities undertaken	
<b>3</b>	Number of businesses created	
<b>4</b>	Number of jobs created and expanded in existing businesses	
<b>\$82,000</b>	Dollar value of grants and resources leveraged by the community	

Figure 1. Summary impact indicator chart showing outcomes of Franklin, NH community visioning process. More examples of infographics are available at: [goo.gl/UxNwzs](http://goo.gl/UxNwzs)

## Are the guidelines actually feasible, given the workloads most Extension educators and specialists face?

Yes, if you use the "but for" attribution principle rather than random selection or paired selection of participant models and if you focus on major programs.

## What is the "but for" attribution principle?

The "but for" attribution principle is used to identify an impact and its size when "someone from outside Extension is willing to state that the Extension program was a critical factor in producing the program's impact."

For one example of how to get these "but for" statements, assume you delivered a program on business plans. After four to six months, you could send an email to participants asking: "What is one thing you have done differently related to developing a business plan, as a result of participating in the 'xyz' Extension program in East Overshoe last October?"

There is a long history of using "but for" statements in tort law and in local economic development. The pros and cons of this approach are discussed in the booklet.

## What does “The Impact Indicators Tips Booklet” cover?

The 40-page booklet includes:

- *General Principles on Collecting Indicators:* We share five principles that make it quicker and easier and that yield better data. For example, which programs make the best candidates to measure impacts? (Tip: Don’t do all programs).
- *Specific Tips on Each of the 23 Indicators:* Most of these indicators are used in the North Central, South and Northeast regions. Specific wording of “but for” attribution principle questions are provided.
- *“But For” Attribution Principle:* This principle is so important that major attention is given to how it differs from its use in law and in local economic development, why it is more legitimate in Extension than in local development incentive projects (hint: when it’s done) and how it compares it to the alternatives for measuring impacts.
- *Examples from Pilot Project:* We show you indicators on five programs and how we collected each indicator. Remember your math teacher insisting that you show how you got the answers? We do.
- *Tips on Communicating and Reporting the Results:* These tips will help you get all the credit you deserve – but also recognize that most programs are done by teams and teams of agencies.

In summary, “The Impact Indicators Tips Booklet” provides the “how-to” tips for collecting the indicators in a fashion that is both practical and credible.

### Available Free Online

You can find a free printer-friendly copy of the 40-page booklet, titled “The Impact Indicators Tips Booklet: Practical and Credible Methods for Using the ‘But For’ Rule to Document Extension Community Development Impacts,” on the Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development website: [aese.psu.edu/nercrd/impacts](http://aese.psu.edu/nercrd/impacts).

### CD Impact Indicators: One Example Hancock County Business Conference

<b>Participation Indicators</b>	
#1 – Number of individual educational contacts	194
<b>Action Indicators</b>	
#8 – Number of businesses making changes in marketing or business management	50
#9 – Number of community and organizational policies and plans developed	1
#10 – Number of community and organizational policies and plans adopted or implemented	1
#11 – Number of volunteer hours	1,500
#12 – Dollar value of volunteer hours leveraged to deliver programs	\$32,210
<b>Impact Indicators</b>	
#13 – Number of new leadership roles	10
#16 – Number of business expansions	6
#17 – Number of jobs expanded in existing businesses	18
#18 – Number of firms retained	4
#19 – Number of jobs retained	8
#21 – Value of grants and resources leveraged by the community.	\$37,400
#22 – Value of grants and resources leveraged by businesses	\$14,500
#23 – Average value of program to participants	\$1,070
<b>Impact Indicators Reported by James McConnon and Louis Bassano, University of Maine Extension</b>	