

# Conference Evaluation Recommendations

## Logic Model

During an early pre-grant or pre-conference planning meeting prepare a Logic Model. This can provide standards for committees to choose presenters and arranging the schedule along with guiding the evaluation.

The Logic Model format from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is a good place to start. There are many types of logic model teaching aids and producing a logic model is not necessarily time-consuming. A set of resources can also be found at [www.iowaee.org](http://www.iowaee.org). Look for REAP-CEP grants and Evaluation.

## Registration Form

You can make the registration form work for you in evaluation as well as the primary task of helping people get registered for the conference. The registration form can be used to gather demographic data that may be useful in post-conference analysis or simply a means to understand your audience better.

Gather home and work e-mail addresses and phone numbers to use for post-conference surveys. Let people know they may be contacted later or ask them to check a permission box indicating they are willing to be contacted.

Gather other demographic data if you have a reason to use it. Don't ask for information if it will not be used!

### **Things to consider for the registration form:**

*Who is attending your conference?*

- Age
- Occupation
- Home and work phone numbers
- Home and work e-mail addresses
- How many years in EE or teaching
- Why did they select this conference
- Is this their first conference

Some people are concerned about privacy. Explain on the registration form how you will use their information. Make sure the keeper of the data base is aware of any promises made about who will have access to the list and how it may be used.

## **After Conference Survey** *(to be completed at the end of the conference)*

Conference planners should use a simple format to simplify data processing by volunteers. Open-ended questions seem simple but more than 100 returned forms can contain so much

written data that volunteers could be overwhelmed with the data and analysis. Once again, the logic model can drive the components needed for this type of survey. Ask what you need to know and avoid the temptation to ask questions that seem useful but not helpful in the end. Ask yourself – what will we DO with this information if we get XX as a response or if we get YYY? Will we do anything differently as an organization or will future planners do anything differently? How can we pass along the results so that people will use the information?

With good reminding in writing and verbal directions at a conference you can ask people to respond to survey forms asking for interesting responses. Expect that some of your returned forms will be unusable if you're using a different question format than normal, but it might be worth doing to get at different kinds of information. For the 2005 Midwest Environmental Education Conference, participants were asked to respond to speakers' ability to stimulate critical thinking and inspire action.

### **Things to consider when designing an after conference survey**

- What do you think a conference does for your target audience? Test for these things.
- Focus on a particular aspect of the conference you're not sure about offering another year.
- Find out what your participants believe is so critical you'd better not mess with it or make a big change.
- Plan to gather more than “happiness” indicators on the after conference survey form. It is okay to include those things, but dig deeper.
- If space allows, include questions for demographic information on this survey. It will allow you to sort participants into useful groups for comparisons.
  1. Did first-timers respond differently?
  2. Did veteran educators like the same things?
  3. Did people from one location perceive things the same way?

**Please note:** Go easy on the demographics and identifiers, however, if you want honest evaluation remarks from participants. For easy sorting during data handling - think carefully where you place the demographic information on the page.

### **Pre-test Survey Forms**

All survey forms should be tested with volunteers as many times as necessary to fix design problems before they are committed to print. Participants interpret directions in various ways. If you want the survey completed correctly, layout and written directions are critical. Check directions by asking people who are not familiar with the conference to fill out a form as if they had attended and see what questions they have about the instructions. Try data processing to test how difficult or easy it will be for volunteers to sort and count and find information on the page.

### **Field Trip Surveys**

Field trips play a key role in most conferences. It is important to show personal and professional outcomes from these field trips. The importance of the time dedicated to field trips may or may not be recognized by participants' supervisors so it is very important to gather outcome information and not just “fun factor” information. Separate field trip surveys are valuable to

show what happens on field trips where conference planners are not present to observe each field trip. Be aware that each field trip requires separate identifiers and separate analyses and could create a mountain of data for volunteers to process. Listing the field trip name at the top allows for easy sorting.

You might lump all field trips together to gather general output and outcomes. Then you do not need identifiers on each field trip form and you can aggregate data for reporting.

Make sure you know the final number to participants on each field trip as well as how many surveys are filled out and returned. The field trip numbers may change from the recorded registration numbers. After receiving the conference registrations, there may be a need to combine two field trips into one for efficiency or other reasons. Make sure you then identify that field trip by a new name so that the registration field trip list and the new field trip are not confused on the survey forms. (*This occurred at the 2005 Midwest EE Conference and different names for field trip were listed by participants and the evaluators were not sure how to sort some surveys.*)

It is possible to receive a 100% return on the field trip surveys if the field trip leader understands that the field trip survey is one of their primary responsibilities and follows through in having the survey completed before the participants leave the field trip.

## **Post Conference Survey**

A post-conference survey is crucial if participants are going to have time to DO something as a result of the conference – or for outcomes to develop and be expressed. Whoever has the most vested interests in getting this information should be in charge of carrying this out – this is likely to be driven by funders in the future as it was for the 2005 Midwest EE Conference. Conference funders and sponsors want to know more than just how many people showed up and how happy they were, though that is still important to collect too. ***Funders, sponsors, and others want to know conference outcomes, not just outputs.***

Post conference surveys could be done by e-mail or by phone. The return rate is often higher than if a survey by letter is sent out. **E-mail survey** for post-conference surveying can work. Getting correct e-mail addresses can be a challenge. But be aware that there are fees for e-mail survey analysis unless the survey is small enough with a small enough data set to qualify for the free SurveyMonkey service or others. See [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com) for more information.

## **Confidentiality**

Demographics and confidentiality can be tricky issues for conference evaluators. Consider carefully what demographic data is **NEEDED** to make the data as useful as possible but don't over do it. Occupational and organizational information can pinpoint individuals even if their name is not present on a form, causing breeches of confidentiality.

If volunteers are processing the evaluation forms, limit the amount of open-ended questions if you expect to receive 100 forms or more. Handwriting can be recognizable in a small community of people who know each other well, threatening confidentiality and anonymity –

and it can be hard to read! Because we know from experience that conference planners search first to read the open-ended questions, include all written comments from all surveys in the appendices you report. However, making meaning from that much data is time-consuming and could be discouraging for volunteers without training in analyzing qualitative data.

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**Iowa Department  
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