

Chapter 7

Evaluating Your Peer Network

Are we accomplishing our goals?

Why do an evaluation?

An evaluation (in the context of a peer network) is the act of collecting information from your participants to discover the significance, worth, or quality to them of a meeting, an event, or the group experience on the whole. If you receive grant funding or want to ask for funding, if you want to know if your network is accomplishing its goal or could be improved in some way, you will want to do an evaluation.

Other reasons to evaluate your work include:

- Raise awareness and understanding
- Measure progress towards your goals
- Set direction for your program
- Fine-tune your program
- Support decision making
- Demonstrate accountability
- Show impact

Designing your evaluation

There are many useful guides for designing and planning evaluations. A great place to start is with your program goals. (See Chapter 1 for information on program goals).

Make your evaluation be:

- Quick and to the point
- Quantifiable
- Repeatable
- Easy to collect
- Specific to situation, context, and timing
- Cost-effective
- Able to tell the whole story
- Regionally applicable



Photo by Amanda Subjin, © Oregon State University

Flip charts, easels, and markers are critical tools for a good meeting wrap-up! Having one note taker and one group facilitator really helps the process flow smoothly.

What to measure

Demographics

This isn't always necessary, though some grantors require this kind of information to help characterize your participants. You can always let your survey participants know they are welcome to pass by any question they do not feel like answering.

- Acres stewarded
- Number of years the land has been owned by this landowner, in the family, or both
- Age
- Gender
- Income
- County of residence

Effectiveness of your network, subjective

- Perceived relevance to participants' goals
- Perceived extent to which the program has met its stated goals
- Perceived extent to which the program has increased knowledge
- Perceived likelihood that participants will implement what they've learned, or their intent to use what they've learned. For example: "As a result of this network, what will you do differently this year?"
- Perceived extent to which participants feel they can help other landowners
- Perceived extent to which participants feel they are helped by others
- Perceived monetary value of program

Effectiveness of your network, objective

- Number of participants who attend programs
- Number of landowners being reached by peers
- Hours dedicated to sharing what participants have learned with neighbors and other landowners
- How participants have shared what they've learned (e.g., staffed displays at farm shows or fairs, written articles in newspapers, talked to a group)

Forest stewardship

- Knowledge of forest stewardship practices and behavior
- Knowledge of where to go for more information
- Use of appropriate resources for more information
- Activities on own land

How do you collect information?

Informal assessments

One of the simplest and most efficient ways to collect information is in person, before your participants go home. One very simple method is to divide a flip chart into two columns headed with statements like:

Worked well	Could be improved
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(or)

Plus	Minus
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This simple method can provide very useful information and promote discussion among participants. It's important that participants feel safe to express their opinions.

Surveys

There are two surveys in this chapter: a sample **event evaluation** (the sample is for a retreat), used to measure the program's quality up to now and plan for future programs (pages 62–65); and a **program needs assessment**, used to plan and develop priorities for the next year's programs (pages 66–70).

Online surveys

If you work for a university or other organization, you most likely have access to a free online survey tool. If you don't have access through an employer, there are several basic tools you can use for free, including:

- Survey Monkey <http://www.surveymonkey.com/>
- Kwik Surveys <http://kwiksveys.com/>
- Zoomerang <http://www.zoomerang.com>

Surveys by U.S. Mail

You may have a greater response rate from rural populations if you mail your survey. However, your costs will be much higher, from \$2 to \$5 for printing and postage (to both send and have survey returned) per survey. If you do a survey by mail, we suggest including an addressed return envelope that includes postage, and a cover letter explaining the purpose of the evaluation, how anonymity will be preserved, and how the results will be used.

Evaluation resources

The American Evaluation Association website contains a lot of tips as well as an evaluator locator to help you find local expertise. <http://www.eval.org>

Penn State Extension has several simple Evaluation Tip Sheets. <http://extension.psu.edu/evaluation/titles.html>

Oregon State University Extension evaluation specialist Molly Engle posts a regular blog covering all things evaluation. <http://blogs.oregonstate.edu/programevaluation/>

WOWNET RETREAT EVALUATION

Please help us improve our educational services by completing the following WOWnet Evaluation. Your responses will remain anonymous. If you have any question, please contact_____.

1. Please rate the following reasons for attending the WOWnet Retreat in terms of their importance to you.

	Not at all important	Very unimportant	Neither important nor unimportant	Very important	Extremely important
Learn new forest stewardship information					
Learn about forestry resources in my area					
Meet other women with similar interests					
Network with forestry professionals					
Learn how I can contribute to WOWnet					
See what others are doing on their land					
Learn new skills to use on my land					

2. Did you have other reasons for attending the retreat? Please enter them here.

3. Please rate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements, both before and after attending the retreat.

	Before the retreat				After the retreat					
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I feel more confident about stewarding my land.										
I know who to contact with forestry-related questions.										
I better understand forestry-related terms.										
I am excited to be part of this community.										
I know what I want my forest to look like in 20 years.										
I am excited to share what I know.										
I want to take more forestry classes.										

4. What did you LIKE MOST about the retreat?

5. What would you like to SEE IMPROVED for the next retreat?

6. In the next 6 months, how likely are you to do the following?

	Very unlikely	Unlikely	Undecided	Likely	Very likely
Write a Stewardship Plan					
Contact a WOWnet member I met at the retreat					
Attend a woodland owner event					
Join my local Small Woodland Owner Association					
Contact a forestry professional					
Host a WOWnet event					
Attend a WOWnet event					
Visit the WOWnet website					
Assess my property for management needs					
Conduct a harvesting operation					
Plant trees					

**7. How do you think you will apply what you have learned from this retreat to your forest stewardship?
If you think you will apply nothing at all, please include that as well.**

**8. How do you think you might participate in WOWnet in the future?
If not at all, please include that as well.**

9. How many acres of woodland do you own or serve as primary manager for? _____ acres

10. How many years have you owned or cared for your land? _____ years

11. What is your current age? (Please choose one.)

- ☐ 1–20
- ☐ 21–30
- ☐ 31–40
- ☐ 41–50
- ☐ 51–60
- ☐ 61–70
- ☐ 71–80
- ☐ 81+

Thank you for your input. Do you have any other comments? Please include them here.

WOWNET NEEDS ASSESSMENT

This survey is being conducted to help WOWnet better serve its members—you!

This survey is completely voluntary. Your responses will remain anonymous. If there is a question you do not want to answer, please skip forward to the next question.

1. How did you hear about WOWnet? Please check all that apply.

- ☐ Email
- ☐ Newsletter
- ☐ Newspaper
- ☐ Word of mouth
- ☐ Internet search
- ☐ Other _____

2. How many WOWnet gatherings have you attended?

- ☐ I have not yet attended
- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2–4
- ☐ 5+

3. How many WOWnet events have you helped host?

- ☐ 0
- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4+

4. What motivated you to join WOWnet?

	Not at all important	Very unimportant	Neither important nor unimportant	Very important	Extremely important
Meet other women with similar interests					
Network with other women					
Addresses my interests more than other programs					
Feel more comfortable with women-only events					
Opportunity to share					

The following questions will help us figure out when and how best to offer programs.

5. How often would you like to meet with a local WOWnet group?

(Please choose one).

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Every month, year round
- ☐ Monthly, fall and spring only
- ☐ Every other month
- ☐ Quarterly
- ☐ Annually

6. What is your best meeting day and time?
(Choose as many as apply.)

- ☐ Weekday morning
- ☐ Weekday afternoon
- ☐ Weekday evening
- ☐ Saturday morning
- ☐ Saturday afternoon
- ☐ Sunday morning
- ☐ Sunday afternoon

7. What types of learning events would you most prefer?

	Very strongly avoid	Strongly avoid	Indifferent	Strongly prefer	Very strongly prefer
Lecture-style presentations from experts					
Field tour					
Hands-on practice					
Learn from other WOWnet members					
Online webinars					
Classes with some lecture, some field					
Multi-day retreat					

8. How useful do you find the following communication tools?

	Very useless	Useless	Neutral	Useful	Very useful
Website					
Email listserv					
Mailed flyers					
Newspaper announcements					
Forestry newsletters					
Facebook					
Phone call					

9. Are you willing to host a WOWnet program?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ No

The following questions help us understand you better.

10. Are you the primary steward of your woodland?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

11. How many years have you been caring for your land?

- ☐ Less than 1 year
- ☐ 1–5 years
- ☐ 6–10 years
- ☐ More than 10 years

12. How many acres of woodland do you own or steward? _____ acres

13. What is the ownership structure of your woodland?

- ☐ Family
- ☐ Single owner
- ☐ Cooperative
- ☐ Partnership
- ☐ Other _____

14. I could manage my land better if I knew about....

15. I could manage my land better if only I had....

16. If you would like to tell us more about your woodland and stewardship, please do so here: