

Building the Capacity of ANNIES Educators to Help Women Farmers and Ranchers Improve Agricultural Sustainability

Final Report for ENC11-123

Project Type: Professional Development Program

Funds awarded in 2011: \$75,000.00

Projected End Date: 12/31/2015

Region: North Central

State: Iowa

Project Coordinator:

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Iowa State University Extension and Outreach

Project Information

Abstract:

2015 Video Report: <https://vimeo.com/144112132>.

The USDA reports 31% of all farmers/ranchers are women; yet these women are an underserved audience. According to a Journal of Extension article, one best practice for professional development is to bring educators together around a program of mutual benefit. Annie's Project is a well-established program for farm/ranch women. With this in mind, three regional and two national Annie's Project educator conferences were held during the four years of the project from 2012 to 2015.

The overall goal was to prepare educators to teach business management skills to farm/ranch women. The primary objectives were to:

1. meet educator needs for networking, programming and expertise,
2. present curricula and methodologies,
3. demonstrate and provide on-going support, and
4. encourage delivery of programs for farm/ranch women.

There was a total of 167 people attending the professional development conferences, or 125 unique participants, since some people attended more than once. Participants came from 26 different states. In summary, 70 unique participants were extension educators from the NC SARE states, 21 were extension educators from other states, 24 were USDA, industry and not-for-profit representatives, and 10 were farm and ranch women.

The Annie's Project leadership team and guest speakers led tours, presentations, video storytelling, panels and group discussions. The Research Institute for Studies in Education designed and conducted an independent evaluation. In 2014 and 2015, a survey was developed using Qualtrics (TM) online software. Educators were emailed the survey two months after the conferences.

There were 54 attendees in 2014, and 57 in 2015, coming from 26 states. Participants returned 32 completed surveys in 2014, and 25 in 2015. Responses indicated 98% rated the overall quality of the professional development as above average or excellent. Respondents planned to offer 124 Annie's Project and similar courses plus 75 other programs for farm/ranch women within 18 months.

The survey results provide evidence that the Annie's Project regional and national professional development conferences were effective in preparing educators to teach farm/ranch women skills for managing their businesses.

Project Objectives:

The goals developed for the proposed three-year project were to reach 100 people with three professional development programs. We were able to extend the project grant to four years and conduct five professional development programs.

Training was held in Nebraska (2012) and Indiana (2013) as anticipated. However, it did not work out to hold a training in Minnesota (2014) as anticipated because of a change in partner circumstances and an expressed desire to attend conferences in Iowa. Additional conferences were held in South Dakota (2013) and Iowa (2014, 2015.)

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Train-the-trainer materials were developed and refined for the project and posted online at www.anniesproject.org. However, to better manage the program, most online training materials are only available for educators completing a training for by special request.

This project utilized about \$67,000 (89%) of the requested \$75,000 in NC SARE funds. Of this about \$31,000 (46%) was utilized for conference travel reimbursements for educators in the NC SARE states. About \$8,000 (12%) of project funds went to our partner, the Annie's Project - Education for Farm Women non-profit organization for training content and delivery. Dividing the utilized funds by the total number of participants (167) provides a cost of about \$400 per participant on average. The average is useful for comparison, but please keep in mind NC SARE funds were leveraged with other travel funds for those outside of the NC SARE region plus other sponsorship from partnering organizations.

Introduction:

According to USDA, 31% of all farmers/ranchers in the United States are women; yet these women are an underserved audience. There is a need to provide professional development to help educators expand their reach and offer high quality educational programs to this audience. Since 2003, more than 12,000 women in 38 states have benefited from Annie's Project courses that teach farm/ranch business and risk management skills. Annie's Project courses are a well-established model for educating farm/ranch women. There were three Annie's Project regional educator conferences presented from 2012 to 2013, and two national conferences presented in 2014 and 2015. The professional development programs were designed to share best practices, curricula, and methodologies among all educators interested in serving farm/ranch women. The conferences included presentations, video

storytelling, tours, panels and group discussions.

This report summarizes some of the professional development methodologies used, describes the Annie's Project educational model for teaching farm/ranch women business management skills, and provides an overview of the conferences, evaluation methods, participants and results. The Research Institute for Studies in Education at Iowa State University designed and conducted an independent evaluation of the 2014 and 2015 conferences. Based on those survey results, this report summarizes the evidence of the effectiveness of the professional development conferences.

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Education & Outreach Initiatives

Objective:

Description:

Methods

Annie's Project:

A 2014 Journal of Extension article by Garst and team identified one of the best practices for professional development is to bring educators together around a program or practice of mutual benefit (<http://www.joe.org/joe/2014october/a2.php>.) Annie's Project is a well-established program that can help Extension educators meet the educational needs of farm/ranch women.

Annie's Project is the agricultural business education program that empowers farm and ranch women who want to be even more knowledgeable about their agricultural enterprises. Annie's Project creates a comfortable and supportive learning environment focused on the best farm business management practices. Since the program's beginning in 2003, more than 12,000 farm/ranch women in 38 states have participated in Annie's Project courses.

The Annie's Project - Education for Farm Women mission is to empower farm and ranch women to be better business partners and owners through networks and by managing and organizing critical information.

The Annie's Project methodologies offer educational strategies designed to meet the learning preferences of farm/ranch women. The curriculum is designed to be offered as an 18-hour, multi-session, local extension course. The Annie's Project core values are safe harbor, connection, discovery, and guided intelligence. The key principles follow.

1. Teach agricultural business management in each of the risk areas of finance, human resources, legal, marketing, and production.
2. Invite local women service providers to serve as guest speakers where possible.
3. Allocate half of class time to discussion and hands-on activities.
4. Provide unbiased, researched based information.
5. Create a learning environment where mentoring is spontaneous. Managing for Today and Tomorrow is a farm/ranch transition planning course and Moving Beyond the Basics is a farm/ranch financial tools course. Multi-state groups of Extension educators developed these courses in the tradition of Annie's Project. These courses were also presented in the train-the-trainer sessions.

Conference Design:

The regional and national Annie's Project Educator Professional Development Conferences each provided 10 to 18 hours of instruction. The elements of Extension professional development, suggested by Garst and team, which lead to effective program implementation, were incorporated into the conference planning. The conference offered learning and leadership opportunities for educators in all four of the career stages identified in a 1994 Journal of Extension article by Rennekamp and Nell (<http://www.joe.org/joe/1994june/a2.php>.)

All the conferences included the Annie's Project curriculum as well as Managing for Today and Tomorrow curriculum on farm transition planning. Some also included Moving Beyond the Basics curriculum on financial management and record-keeping. The conferences utilized personal and video storytelling, presentations, panels and group discussions. Information on sustainable agriculture and farm/ranch risk management topics were discussed at each conference. Opportunities were built into the agendas for networking among participants. The conferences trained participants on the program planning processes as identified below.

1. Needs assessment.
2. Curricula development.
3. Program development including funding and marketing.
4. Course implementation including selection of guest speakers.
5. Evaluation and reporting.

Conference invitations were extended to a diverse mix of Extension professionals,

USDA and agricultural industry professionals, farm/ranch women and individuals from non-profit organizations.

The conferences were designed and implemented by the Annie's Project National Leadership Team; Karisha Devlin, Tim Eggers, Ruth Hambleton, Lynn Heins, Jason Johnson, Kelvin Leibold, Lani McKinney, Madeline Schultz, Mary Sobba, and Karen Westbrook. The primary sponsors of the conferences were North Central SARE Professional Development Program, Farm Credit System, Iowa State University, and Annie's Project - Education for Farm Women non-profit organization.

Evaluation Methods:

The conference organizers collaborated with Dr. Mandi Anderson, Research Scientist, Research Institute for Studies in Education (RISE) at Iowa State University to evaluate the conferences in 2014 and 2015. A survey instrument was developed using Qualtrics (TM) online survey software. Following the conferences, educators were emailed the survey link. The same instrument was used each year in order to aggregate the data. The survey asked participants how prepared they felt to deliver courses for farm/ranch women. How well the conference helped educators meet individual programming goals, enhance networks, and learn about risk management and agricultural sustainability was included. Questions were built-in about the interest in available resources for on-going support. The surveys also asked about the courses and programs the educators intended to offer with-in 18 months. The results were analyzed and reported to the conference leadership team, with no personal identifiers. Two years of evaluation data are summarized here.

Outreach and Publications

A journal article was prepared and submitted to the Journal of the National Association of County Agricultural Agents (NACAA) to share the design and evaluation results of the professional development programs. If the article is accepted, it will be published in the June 2016 issue. In addition, a poster was prepared and accepted for exhibit at the July 2016 NACAA national conference in Arkansas.

Outcomes and impacts:

Participants:

The surveys were utilized in 2014 and 2015. There were 112 conference attendees: 54 people in 2014 and 57 people in 2015. Since some people attended more than one conference, there were 92 unique individuals. The participants traveled from 26 states. About 60% of participants were from the North Central SARE states of Iowa, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, North Dakota, Nebraska, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. About 40% of participants were from states outside the North Central SARE region: Alabama, Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas, and Wyoming.

The majority of participants, 67%, were from university Extension systems. Other program supporters and educators included the following.

- 10% Farm Credit System educators and partners
- 9% Farm/ranch women
- 7% USDA staff (RMA, RME, FSA, NRCS)
- 5% Non-profit organization leaders
- 2% Iowa State University students

Of these conference participants, 32 completed surveys in 2014 and 25 completed surveys in 2015. The results of the two conferences and 57 surveys are analyzed and reported together.

Overall Quality of the Professional Development:

For a grouping of eight questions about the overall quality of the conference, the overall mean was 3.5 on a 4.0 scale. Scoring categories included poor, below average, above average, and excellent. Responses indicated 98% of participants rated the overall quality of the professional development as above average or excellent. Item means ranged from 3.70 for 'Interaction with ANNIE'S staff,' and 3.65 for 'Organization of the conference' to 3.27 for 'Selection of topics.'

How Well Professional Development Met Educator Needs:

Respondents indicated how well the professional development provided them with opportunities to meet programming goals, enhance professional networks, and increase understanding of risk management and agricultural sustainability topics. The scoring categories included none, a little, some, and a great deal. Over three-fourths of respondents felt the conferences contributed 'A great deal' or 'Some' to achievement of each of these goals.

Survey respondents provided explanations for their responses:

- "Annie's Project is the keystone of my educational program. It is essential and helps support the other programs I offer."
- "What a great opportunity to meet the people behind the project, and also those with the program knowledge and experience."
- "It helped me see the bigger picture on how sustainability encompasses nearly every management decision that farmers/ranchers make on a daily basis."
- "I already had a good knowledge base of risk management topics, but I am always learning more."

Preparedness to Offer Annie's Project and Similar Courses: Participants indicated how well they felt the conference prepared them to deliver Annie's Project, Managing for Today and Tomorrow, and Moving Beyond the Basics courses designed for farm/ranch women. Eighty percent of respondents reported they felt well prepared or prepared.

Respondents' explanations for their feelings of preparedness included the following representative comments:

- "Every time I attend an Annie's Project professional development opportunity, I feel more connected with the program and better able to facilitate it. I really enjoyed the Annie's traditions session. The panel with [the farmers], my gosh that was so powerful."
- "Not enough detailed information given on the content [curriculum] for offering a quality Annie's Project course."
- "I was unsure of how the Managing for Today and Tomorrow curriculum went and I learned a lot and feel comfortable offering this program."

Plans for Accessing On-going Support Survey respondents also indicated interest in networking resources. Most would access newsletters (91%) additional national or regional meetings (74%), teleconferences (66%), and educator contact lists (64%).

Survey respondents provided explanations for their responses:

- “Since the meeting, I have become more aware of additional outreach resources and ways to connect and learn from other educators.”
- “The discussion with peers throughout the conference was very helpful and encouraging.”

In addition, survey respondents were well informed of the Annie’s Project websites: 95% knew about available online resources for the public and for educators. When rating the educator website, 56% found it very useful; 27% said it was useful; 4% found it somewhat useful; and none indicated it was not useful (mean of 3.8 out of 4.0). When asked to gauge the usefulness of various marketing materials that currently are or could be provided to the network of educators, 76% of survey respondents said they want to use templates for customizing print materials and 71% said they want examples for writing news releases. About half were interested in videos (53%) and logos and graphics (49%). About one-third of survey respondents were interested in radio announcement examples, fliers, display materials, photos/images, banners and posters.

About half or more of survey respondents are willing to increase interaction with their peers in the following ways: share state results/impact reports with others (72%), help with future train-the-trainer programs (68%), collaborate on grant projects with one or more states (48%), and participate in online social networks (46%). About one-third of survey respondents indicated a willingness to write newsletter articles (32%), present a webinar on a teaching topic (36%), be part of a national evaluation team (34%), be part of a national course development team (30%), develop website content (30%), or serve on a national leadership team (28%). Being part of a communications team was of less interest (18%).

Use of Nationally Available Evaluation Instruments: Annie’s Project – Education for Farm Women currently partners with Iowa State University to offer standard survey instruments, data compilation and reports to all trained educators for Annie’s Project courses. The survey asked how educators anticipated using these nationally available evaluation instruments. There were 31% of survey respondents who said they would use the online surveys with their course participants; 24% would use the paper surveys, 39% will use both, and 6% do not plan to use them.

Survey participants also indicated how they plan to use the evaluation results that would be provided to them.

- 94% will compare the pre-course and post-course reports to identify changes in participant knowledge and actions.
- 81% will use reports to improve future courses.
- 78% will share results with their supervisor/institution.
- 76% will use the pre-course reports to tailor the course/speakers to meet audience needs
- 67% will share results with sponsors.
- 33% will compare reports to state or national reports.

A few respondents indicated they planned to develop their own evaluation instruments and/or publish posters/papers.

Accessing Program Partners: Survey respondents also told us about the partners they intend to utilize in offering programs to farm/ranch women.

- USDA: 78% plan to access Farm Service Agency, 56% - Natural Resources

Conservation Service, 56% - regional Extension Risk Management Education centers, and 49% - Risk Management Agency. Others noted they would utilize conservation districts, SARE and NIFA.

- Farmer/Rancher Membership organizations: 85% plan to access Farm Bureau, 27% - commodity groups, and 10% - Farmers Union.
- Educational Institutions: 74% plan to access 1862 Land-Grant universities, 35% 1890 Land-Grant universities, 28% community colleges.
- No respondents indicated they would access Hispanic serving institutions or Federally Recognized Tribal Extension Partners/1994 institutions.
- Farm Credit System: 94% plan to access this partnering resource.
- Respondents listed numerous other partners such as local banks and farming organizations/groups, attorneys, implement dealers - other ag supply vendors, crop improvement associations, state departments of agriculture and workforce development offices.

Plans for Programming in the Next 18 Months: Survey respondents indicated how many courses they planned to offer to farm/ranch women in the next 18-months. Participants intended to offer 82 Annie's Project courses, 26 Managing for Today and Tomorrow courses, and 16 Moving Beyond the Basics courses. In addition, they indicated the number of other conferences, courses, workshops or tours they planned to offer including human resource, crop insurance, and succession/estate planning topics: statewide conferences, webinars, and discussion/peer groups. As for target audiences educators planned to recruit and deliver programs to: 91% plan to serve farm/ranch women, 76% small/niche farmers/ranchers, 76% beginning farmers/ranchers, 44% socially disadvantaged/minority farmers/ranchers, and 41% limited resource farmers/ranchers.

Top Goals for Using Conference Information:

Of the 29 responses to the question about the top three ways they will use information from the conference, 18 included specific intentions to deliver Annie's Project, Managing for Today and Tomorrow, or Moving Beyond the Basics courses. Another 12 mentioned communications, such as social media, recruiting, branding, newsletters, and displays. Nine included statements about increased confidence and using what they now know to improve programming. Responses included 7 statements about statewide program coordination and sharing information with colleagues. Another 7 talked about increasing use of the Annie's Project websites and materials. There were 5 statements about utilizing expanded networks to learn from others and 5 statements about working with speakers and partners.

Representative comments included:

- "1) New brand guidelines will help with a consistent experience, 2) I'm less wary of partnering with government entities after hearing about the USDA partnerships, and 3) the activities and exercises described in the designing curricula segment were very interesting."
- "1) Use the information to work more closely with guest speakers, 2) have more confidence in teaching the areas I teach, and 3) be able to talk about national efforts when recruiting participants."

Additional Suggestions and Comments:

Participants were given the opportunity to offer any additional suggestions or comments. Representative responses included:

- “Continue to offer annual conferences, continue the newsletters, and expand the use of social media for educators throughout the country.”
- “I would have liked more opportunity to speak with other state program coordinators on how they collaborate with the trained educators in their state.”
- “More video of Annie’s Project courses so I could get the feel for the classroom environment.”
- “I very much enjoyed the fellowship and felt supported by the national team which inspired me to go home and do a good job for my farmers. I also really like the new promotional materials.”
- “I had a great time and feel like it was an efficient use of my time. The extra tours were nice. I also enjoyed the panels.”
- “Thank you for hosting this and for your attention to detail. ISU was a fun place to be, too!”

Project Outcomes

Project outcomes:

- 5 professional development programs
- 1 train-the-trainer program developed and refined
- 125 unique people trained
- 22 states represented
- 34 current states and state coordinators offering Annie’s Project programs
- 2 conference impact videos
- 1 journal article (submitted)
- 1 national poster presentation

Recommendations:

Potential Contributions

The survey results provide evidence that the Annie’s Project national professional development conferences were effective in preparing educators to teach farm/ranch women skills for managing their businesses. In summary, survey responses indicated 98% of participants rated the overall quality of the professional development as above average or excellent.

Expertise and networking: The conferences attracted a diverse audience with one to forty years of adult education experience. Demonstrating an Annie’s Project best education practice for farm/ranch women, experienced educators also became trainers and mentors by serving as presenters, panelists, and discussion leaders. Survey respondents demonstrated several of the motivational tenants Rennekamp and Nell described in their career stages. Those describing base-level skills for developing and delivering programs may identify with entry stage. Others writing about programming expertise or peer networks may identify most closely with the colleague stage. Those writing about county and state program coordination or deep expertise in areas such as evaluation or curricula development may identify with the

counselor stage. Still others writing about being mentors and starting new programs may identify with the advisor stage.

Curricula and Methodologies: As Garst and team suggests, bringing educators together from across organizations and states around a program of mutual benefit was an effective strategy for meeting professional development needs. Sharing the well-established Annie's Project curriculum and two new curricula, *Managing for Today and Tomorrow* and *Moving Beyond the Basics*, helped provide effective educational models. Learning about the Annie's Project history and program values helped educators understand women's learning preferences. Discussion of the program planning processes and information on risk management and sustainable agriculture improved educator understanding of these topics. Conference participants gained the confidence and support needed to meet their local programming needs.

Ongoing Support: Survey respondents are interested in future meetings, conferences and webinars for more professional development. They plan to access websites, newsletters, social media, and other types of interconnectivity for continued learning and networking. Furthermore, respondents said they would enhance the network by helping with professional development events, serving on national committees and sharing program impacts. Conference participants commented it was very motivating and useful to network with educators from other states and that they planned to continue those relationships.

Delivery of Programs: Survey respondents said they planned to offer 82 Annie's Project courses, 26 *Managing for Today and Tomorrow* courses, and 16 *Moving Beyond the Basics* courses; plus 75 other programs and events for farm/ranch women within 18 months. Survey responses documented skill development, innovation, and adaptation to changing environments as impacts of the professional development. In noting their top three goals for applying what they learned, survey respondents indicated an increased level of planning and teaching skills. Several respondents indicated goals for statewide coordination and working more with peers. Respondents planned to adapt and implement new activities in response to changing needs. Innovations included development of social networking and online marketing, incorporating aspects of other programming into farm/ranch women programming, focusing more on business/risk management and sustainability topics, accessing new resources and networks, and utilizing teaching methodologies that are well suited to and preferred by the target audience.

The national Annie's Project professional development conferences helped educators identify the needs of farm/ranch women audiences they plan to serve, reflect on personal long-term professional development goals to help meet those programming needs, and improve overall career success through networking and exploration of effective program models.

30538. Acknowledgements The primary sponsor of the conferences was the North Central SARE Professional Development Program, grant number 2011-47001-30538. The Farm Credit System, Iowa State University, and Annie's Project - Education for Farm Women non-profit organization were partnering sponsors. The conferences were designed and implemented by the Annie's Project National Leadership Team; Karisha Devlin, Tim Eggers, Ruth Hambleton, Lynn Heins, Jason Johnson, Kelvin Leibold, Lani McKinney, Madeline Schultz, Mary Sobba, and Karen Westbrook.

Future Recommendations

Some of the most important lessons learned from the Annie's Project professional development program came from the participants themselves. It was important to include attendees as guest presenters, session leaders, and panel members. It was also important to build networking time into the agendas.

Bringing people from different states together around a program of interest is a good idea. Participants had from zero to 30 years of extension programming experience, but everyone had an interest in serving an audience of farm and ranch women, and everyone had an interest in the Annie's Project methodologies. This made for diverse and robust conversations about how to best serve the audience using a variety of extension tools and methods.

Annie's Project provides on-going support and resources for trained educators including marketing templates, evaluation instruments, planning guides and a strong network of educators willing to help one another. This support is critical to the success of educators around the country who may not have this type of support or assistance locally.

The team planned training on both risk management education and sustainable agriculture at every conference. However, feedback indicated a desire for more on these topics. It could be that we need to offer newer educators, especially, additional opportunities to learn how to present key farm management concepts to farm and ranch women.

Although we incorporated hands-on and experiential learning in all conferences, there was an interest in more activities, more time to process information, and more time to begin planning local programs with the expert advice that was available during the conference. One way to do this within the time constraints could be with an optional evening work session.

Information Products

- [Annie's Project Newsletter July 2104](#) (Article/Newsletter/Blog)
- [Highlights from Annie's Project National Educator Conference July 7 - 10, 2014:](#) (Multimedia)
- [National Extension Educators Talk About Annie's Project](#) (Multimedia)
- [Agenda for Annie's Project National Educator Conference 2014](#) (Conference/Presentation Material)
- [Poster: Evaluation of Annie's Project PDP Conferences](#) (Other)
- [2015 Video Report, National Annie's Project Professional Development Program](#) (Multimedia)
- [2015 Project Report](#) (Other)
- [2015 Agenda, National Annie's Project Educator Professional Development Conference](#) (Other)

- [2015 Annie's Project Professional Development Slide Set \(Other\)](#)
- [Dr. Cathann Kress's Remarks to the 2015 Conference Attendees \(Other\)](#)
- [Sept. 2015 Annie's Project Newsletter \(Article/Newsletter/Blog\)](#)
- [A Model for Professional Development: Annie's Project National Educator Conferences](#)

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