Considerations for Conducting Educational Events at Nurseries

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Additional index words: team, venue, CIRRIG, field day, workshop

Extension personnel often conduct educational events at nurseries. These events are commonly referred to as field days or workshops. The information transferred and knowledge gained by participants is usually related to some process or procedure featured at the nursery. Hence, some aspect of plant production becomes the educational subject matter and the nursery becomes the venue. This integration or linkage of subject matter and venue provides an excellent means to disseminate information. However, the nursery site venue can result in some significant challenges. Based on the authors’ experiences, considerations when contemplating an educational event at a nursery are presented. The considerations are broadly categorized into three periods of time: prior, during, and after the event. Example considerations are given for each period of time.

Educational events conducted at a nursery are an effective means of transferring information about new processes or procedures. The on-site venue provides participants the opportunity for engagement or active hands-on learning. Engagement reinforces learning and results in practice change, particularly when results from old processes or procedures are compared alongside new. This comparison results in participants developing judgements or decisions based on what they learn about the old and the new. However, the educational value or outcomes of on-site events depend on thorough planning and coordinated execution. Based on the authors’ experiences, we have summarized what should be considered when extension personnel conduct on-site educational events. Each consideration and elaborative information is presented in the order in which one should proceed as they plan and conduct on-site events. The considerations are categorized as prior, during, and after the event.

Materials and Methods

Prior to the event

Consider a host site where management is responsible to your needs. A site with keen management will be important for executing future plans and functions leading up to and including the day of the event. Some considerations of the host site should be: 1) selecting a location that is central to the area from which the attendees will be traveling; 2) adequate parking facilities for attendees; adequate accommodations for meeting space, restrooms, and meals; and 3) adequate staff or personnel that can assist with correctly performing tasks prior to and during the event.

Once you have chosen a site, establish an event team and a chairperson or team leader. The team should be comprised of persons from the host site, county and statewide extension faculties, and representatives from groups, companies, or agencies that provide financial or other support. Once the team membership is determined, a date and event duration are selected approximately...
During the event

During the educational event with participants together as a group. This facilitates informing the participants of logistics, provides the team opportunity to review with participants the upcoming activities, objectives, and respond to questions. If the group is small, it is helpful to have participants introduce themselves to create linkages and promote fellowship. Also, while the participants are together, recognize the team and host personnel, sponsors, donors, and other special guests. Subsequently, participants may be divided and dispersed to various locations on-site where the educational activities are conducted.

Throughout the event, monitor the progress of activities and ensure the appropriate time duration provided on the agenda is used for each activity. Questions and comments that require lengthy explanations should be delayed until all participants reconvene, such as during lunch. Additionally, the time allotted for reconvening can be used for on-site personnel to share their experiences, answer questions, summarize the outcomes of the event, and conduct an evaluation. In addition to input provided by participants on the evaluation, this time should be use for participants to provide input that can be extremely valuable for explaining information in alternative ways that reinforce learning.

After the event

Evaluations completed by the participants provide information about learning outcomes. However, additional information about the logistics of the event, e.g. appropriateness of time allotted between each activity, will be helpful for future planning. The evaluation should be summarized as soon as possible, results shared with the team, and changes noted for the future. All team members should communicate either in a follow-up meeting or electronically (email, telephone conference, etc.) so the event can be reviewed. Strengths and weaknesses regarding logistics and educational content and delivery should be noted for the future.

Completion of a successful on-site event helps develop confidence and defray some of the tension when conducting future events. Successful events build on themselves and gain momentum

Table 1. Summary of considerations for prior, during, and after conducting on-site educational events.

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<th>Prior to the Event</th>
<th>During the Event</th>
<th>After the Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>Select a site.</td>
<td>Begin the event with all participants and team together. Use this time together to provide an overview of the event and to recognize special guests, the team, and personnel from the site.</td>
<td>Team receives results of the evaluations and changes for future events are discussed and noted.</td>
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<td>Establish team of personnel (extension, on-site, and supporters or donors) responsible for planning and conducting the event. Team has a leader or chair and all team members have specific responsibilities.</td>
<td>Monitor progress of the event’s activities as slated on the agenda.</td>
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<td>Establish date for event approximately six months in advance with priority for selecting the date given to personnel at the site of event.</td>
<td>Close the event with all participants and team together. Use this time to answer questions, solicit comments and have participants evaluate the event.</td>
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<td>Develop an agenda along with the details for registration and advertising the event.</td>
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<td>Formulate a budget based on projected expenses.</td>
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<td>Review with team all activities, components, and logistics of conducting the event one week prior to the event. All team members report on the progress associated with their responsibilities and contingency plans are developed.</td>
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six months prior to the event. Priority for selecting the date should be given to personnel from the host site. Maximum duration or length of an event should be approximately four hours with time before and after the event for travel.

The team should conduct an in-depth tour of the site with host personnel to gain specific information that will affect the outcome of the event. These might include where speakers will be positioned in relation to the audience due to direction of prevailing winds and where ambient light will be in relation to speakers and audience. Also determine where audiovisual equipment, registration, and meals can be accommodated and note locations of infrastructure items such as restrooms, potable water, electrical outlets, and drive/walk paths. Team should also locate the nearest emergency response in case of accidents.

The team will develop an agenda considering educational objectives and projected number of participants. The knowledge gained or behavioral change of the participants results from them engaging in processes or procedures during the time allotted for each agenda item. Thus, the anticipated number of participants will influence the agenda or format of the event. Larger numbers of participants may require longer times for engagement or the agenda items need to be repeated with smaller number of participants each time. The agenda may also be used to accomplish some of the logistics of the event. For example, presenting information to all participants at once while all the participants are together can be beneficial. One way to accomplish this is to provide a meal and end the meal with questions, discussion, or a summary that reinforces what participants learned. The agenda must also consider physical constraints of the site and difficulties that participants might encounter.

Once date and agenda are established, the team decides on advertising format and delivery, how registration will be conducted, and a budget is formulated. The budget obviously projects expenses directly associated with the day of the event; such as costs for the meal, tables, chairs, tents and sound system rental, and transportation to move participants on-site. In addition, budget for advertising, travel by the team for event planning, educational materials, travel expenses and fees for presenters, and expenses to conduct registration. The budgeted expenses are used to determine the cost for each participant to attend or register. Contributions from sponsors and donors may be obtained to offset expenses.

After the agenda and budget are finalized, responsibilities are established for each team member. It is crucial that team members work together and communicate regularly to ensure success. Example responsibilities might include a team member from University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) Extension developing a flyer used to advertise the event and posting the flyer on social media, while a team member from the nursery may be responsible for making and displaying signs used the day of the event.

The team should meet and communicate regularly to plan the event and approximately one week prior to the event a meeting of the team should be conducted on-site. An in-depth review of all activities on the agenda should occur as well as reports from all the team members regarding their specific responsibilities. Contingency plans should also be developed and discussed for activities impacted by weather or team member absence.
for participation, particularly with audiences that like to engage new procedures and processes used by colleagues. In summary, on-site events are positive educational delivery mechanisms that require detailed planning for successful execution. Important considerations needed throughout the event process are given in Table 1.

Results

Example of on-site event

The authors conducted an educational event at two nurseries in 2017. Each educational event was planned and conducted by a team of extension and nursery personnel. At each nursery, the education focused on providing participants with information about a new web-based irrigation control system called Container IRRIGation (CIRRIG) that was developed by UF/IFAS personnel. CIRRIG was used to control irrigation in one area of each nursery and the nurseries’ standard irrigation protocols were used for similar plants located in another area. The irrigation applied to each area was metered. Learning was reinforced at various locations in the nursery where participants learned about the CIRRIG control system and observed plants grown with each method of irrigation control. Approximately 40 participants completed an evaluation and 79% indicated the educational events more than satisfied their expectations.