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Editors' Introduction to This Special Issue

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Editors' Introduction to This Special Issue

Over the last three decades, accountability has become increasingly important for agencies and organizations receiving funding from public or private sources. As the availability of public allocated funds has remained almost level or, in some cases, been reduced, accountability for those funds by agencies that receive the bulk of their funding from public funds has become increasingly scrutinized. Likewise, funds from private sources have become more and more dependent upon evidence that the allocated funds through grants and contracts are being used to produce the results desired by the funders. These situations have become even more precarious as more and more entities, both public and private, compete for the same funding resources.

Two important questions that need to be addressed in both of these situations are: What do funders and other stakeholders want in the way of accountability evidence that is both credible in the eyes of the funders and stakeholders as to the impacts and quality of the programs? and What evidence is actionable in ways to allow funders to act and make decisions about future funding by the funders, for the funding recipients to act and make decisions about modifying and improving programs, and to convince other stakeholders, including program participants, of the value of continuing the programs and the quality of the programs?

This issue of the *Journal of Human Sciences and Extension* focuses on both of these questions and provides readers with in-depth exposure to the meaning of credible and actionable evidence of program effectiveness and quality and how it can be addressed within an organization. The ten articles in this issue cover the basics of what credible and actionable evidence is; how such evidence can be identified, measured, and collected; how credible and actionable evidence can differ depending on different levels of an organization and the stakeholders wanting the evidence; how organizations can build capacity to collect credible and actionable evidence; and how this evidence can best be presented to program stakeholders.

The context in which these articles are presented is the Cooperative Extension System, at the national, state, and local levels of that system. However, the information in these articles can be just as valuable for any agency or organization that has to deal with accountability.

Dr. Ben Silliman and Dr. Scott Cummings served as Co-Editors for this special issue. We wish to thank them for their efforts in bringing together a distinguished group of authors for this special edition and their own contributions as authors. We also want to especially thank the individuals who volunteered their time and efforts to serve as peer reviewers of the articles found in this special edition. The list of these individuals can be found at the end of special edition.

Richard L. Poling and Donna J. Peterson, Co-Editors
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