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ABSTRACT

Two documents are presented that were used to organize, create, and review portfolio evaluations of 93 community-based social action programs sponsored by the National 4-H, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the Kellogg Foundation. The first document, "Project Portfolio Design," was used to direct local program leaders to assemble portfolios. The second document, "Portfolio Panel Review Guide," was used to direct 45 panelists in their review of the submitted portfolios 5 months later. The Youth at Risk programs provide school-age child care and education, reading and science literacy programs, and coalitions for high-risk youth. The combination of 93 programs makes an interesting evaluation problem because of the range of designs and variety of approaches. Portfolios permit local projects to tell their stories by including materials and evidence in a compact format. As a second part of the evaluation design, review panels provide the judgment necessary to use the information in the portfolios. (SLD)

ORIENTATION MATERIALS FOR PORTFOLIO AND PANEL REVIEW EVALUATION OF COMMUNITY-BASED YOUTH AT RISK PROGRAMS

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Building Strong Families, Competent Kids, and Caring Communities

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Portfolio/Panel Evaluation of 93 Community-based Youth at Risk Programs

December 20, 1992

The materials on the following pages were used to organize, create and review portfolio evaluations of 93 community-based, social action programs sponsored by National 4-H, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the Kellogg Foundation. The first document, **PROJECT PORTFOLIO DESIGN,** was used to direct local program leaders to assemble portfolios. The second document, **PORTFOLIO PANEL REVIEW GUIDE,** was used to direct 45 panelists in their review of the submitted portfolios five months later.

Portfolio evaluation is becoming an increasingly popular means for evaluating individuals in educational settings (Herbert, 1992). However, using portfolios for program evaluation is a newer challenge. Thus, the materials in this document are our initial approach to large scale program evaluation with this technique. Results of the use of these guides will be disseminated following our implementation.

The programs

The Cooperative Extension System (a nationwide educational network of U.S. Department of Agriculture, state land-grant universities, and county governments) identified Youth at Risk as a priority for action (Extension Service-USDA, 1992). In fiscal 1991 $7.5 million in federal funds allowed for creation of 70 programs in school-age child care and education, reading and science literacy, and coalitions for high-risk youth (poverty, lack of parental and community support, and negative peer pressure). In 1992 an additional $10 million was used to maintain 68 established programs and create 25 new ones. The projects focus on prevention and intervention rather than treatment. While the programs vary considerably in content, they all provide activities, education, care, and community involvement using extensive local partnerships of public and private agencies.

The combination of 93 diverse, nationwide projects made an interesting evaluation problem. Each project included a cooperative evaluation design in its proposal. Each of these designs was judged to be adequate for accountability and feedback purposes. However, each plan was designed locally as a collaboration among community activists, public agencies, volunteers, and land-grant universities. Thus there was a range of designs from tight pre-, post-intervention measurement experiments to qualitative descriptive. The challenge for overall evaluation across projects was to create a procedure for including the range of quantitative and qualitative designs, extract generalizations about successful strategies for researchers and policy makers, and to provide authoritative reassurance to local projects about the value of their work and, when necessary, formative feedback for improvement.

Program evaluation background

Good program evaluation is a difficult task. Multiple audiences with different agendas are interested in results. Each audience needs to be spoken to with a slightly different language. Fortunately, participants and audiences for YAR projects have essentially the same goal: make a difference for at risk youth. Another evaluation difficulty is that results are promised in proposals, but circumstances change. Parts of programs, even new developments emerge as the most significant components in unexpected ways. In addition to good plans and proposals, audiences for the YAR projects rely on good people, flexible operations, discoveries, and increased understanding of what is to be done. The value of projects is not limited to initial goal statements; evaluations need to reflect added value. Portfolios are a good way to increase the scope of evaluation to account for unintended outcomes, changes, complexity, and multiple audiences.

The need for increased scope in program evaluation comes about from recent critiques of evaluation systems of projects like the YAR initiatives. Ginsburg and colleagues (1992) at the U.S. Department of Education criticized evaluations that "...showed a preoccupation with measuring overall program impacts, particularly test score changes. While achievement outcomes are important, they don't tell the whole story. 'Black box' evaluations that ignore program processes are particularly frustrating...." (p. 24). Evaluations need to illuminate and document the operations of the program ("black box") such as who is involved, for what reasons and to what extent, and what is the actual use of materials and events like. Portfolios give projects the chance to show the internal mechanisms that produce outcomes. Another criticism of Ginsburg, et al. is that evaluations are weak when designed as single, large-scale, multi-issue studies of complex phenomena. "A single study incorporating all...issues is often unwieldy and inefficient compared with using different evaluations to collect intensive information on particular topics. Corroborative findings drawn from several different evaluations may also provide more credible evidence than results from a single study" (p. 24).

Traditionally, evaluation designs emphasize an "experimentalist" approach. Certain outcomes are specified, conditions set for achievement, and standardized measures of pre- and post-performance used. While this approach is valuable, it is not adequate to all of the needs of evaluation activity (Levitan, 1992). "All efforts to quantify net impact have inherent limitations, because the estimates are subject to differing ranges of uncertainty and the applicability of estimates based on samples to a national program remains problematic" (Levitan, p. iv). The reality is that YAR projects are not tight experiments, but widely ranging local interventions. In addition, they depend on their local context for meaning and function.

Still another criticism of large scale evaluation designs made by Ginsburg, et al. is that the findings of important studies too often are not well integrated into decision-making. The problem is that while much of value can be learned from multiple projects, there is a need to link this information as directly as possible with persons who make decisions about future practice, funding, research and development.

Methods and techniques

A portfolio based evaluation system was begun for the Youth at Risk projects by providing guidelines for portfolio construction (**PROJECT PORTFOLIO DESIGN**). Optional portfolios were assembled by local projects as extensions to their approved evaluation plans. Portfolios permit local projects to best tell the story of their project by including additional materials and evidence in a compact format. Portfolios are a strategy to include tight experimental evaluation designs, but also to accommodate the actual diversity of projects, unplanned for learnings and changes of emphasis, and the limits of objective planning. While portfolios may not have the same compelling nature of tight causal cases for linking goals, actions and outcomes, they do accommodate more of what actually happens in multiple project systems. The YAR portfolio evaluation fosters individual projects as multiple data sources: each program focuses on a slightly different set of the constellation of problems and solutions associated with the YAR program as a whole.

Portfolios are only the first half of the innovative evaluation design. Review Panels provide the judgment necessary to use the valuable information contained in the portfolios (**PORTFOLIO PANEL REVIEW GUIDE**). National Review Panels are made up of persons best able to recognize the value, merit and worth in the project portfolios. The 8-14 members for each Panel include national 4-H staff, project directors, Centers for Action directors, representative participants, and decision-makers such as public officials. Review Panels have several tasks. First is to acknowledge the valuable work done by the projects. Second is to recommend additions or changes to make projects more valuable. Third is to summarize patterns of success across projects in terms of ideas, activities, strategies, resources, and materials. Finally, Panels identify political themes for advocacy in public forums.

For the first two functions, Panels will communicate their reactions directly to projects. These responses insure that project efforts are noted, portfolio contents are read, and both formative and summative evaluations are completed. Identification of successful themes, common problems, innovative strategies, successful programs, and participant needs will be given to educational researchers. The most immediate recipients will be researchers collaborating with local projects. A second contact will be through academic papers and convention presentations. The third contact will be documentation through the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC). Identification of themes having political and social value will be summarized by the Panels, and given to agencies making public testimony as to the need for Youth at Risk type activities, additional and continuing funding, and emphases in public policy at the local, state and national levels that address the needs of the youth served by the projects.

Portfolio panel reviews use a valuable commodity: human judgment. Real people in small interactive groups, having discretionary power, have been shown to resourcefully recognize value, compensate for change, make small judgments that enable larger questions of value to be answered, and make their decisions reliably and usefully (Peterson, 1988).

References

Ginsburg, A., McLaughlin, M., Plisko, V. and Takai, R. (1992). Reinvigorating program evaluation at the U.S. Department of Education. *Educational Researcher, 21*(3), 24-27.

Herbert, E. A. (1992). Portfolios invite reflection--from students *and* staff. *Educational Leadership*, 58-61.

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PROJECT

PORTFOLIO

DESIGN

July 27, 1992

Youth At Risk Initiative

Building Strong Families, Competent Kids, and Caring Communities

I. What is a Youth at Risk project portfolio?

a compressed data collection that documents the activity, preparation, and payoffs of a complex project.*

--a portfolio is a optional tool to expand your project evaluation plan in the approved proposal.

--the portfolio does not replace the evaluation plan, but allows your project to best tell your own story with locally selected supplementary materials.

--a portfolio is a format for presenting your evaluation plan results.

--portfolios should look a little to a lot different from each other, but fit your project.

--*compressed means that not everything about a project is included (like in a scrapbook); but rather a carefully selected sample of descriptions, documents, data, and statements are arranged to best represent your project. (see section V: Portfolio Limits).

--portfolios can explain your project, give perspective to evaluation results, add activity information, highlight the most valuable project parts, explain changes, and show off examples and ideas.

--while evaluation and portfolios are key parts of your project, they should not grow so much in importance that they stunt the work of your project with at risk youth. Your project is important for what it does and accomplishes. The portfolio is just a reflection of this activity--not the dominating project activity. (see section V- Portfolio Limits).

--portfolios are only half the evaluation review process. People to read and use the information are the other half. (see sections VII and VIII on Review Panels).

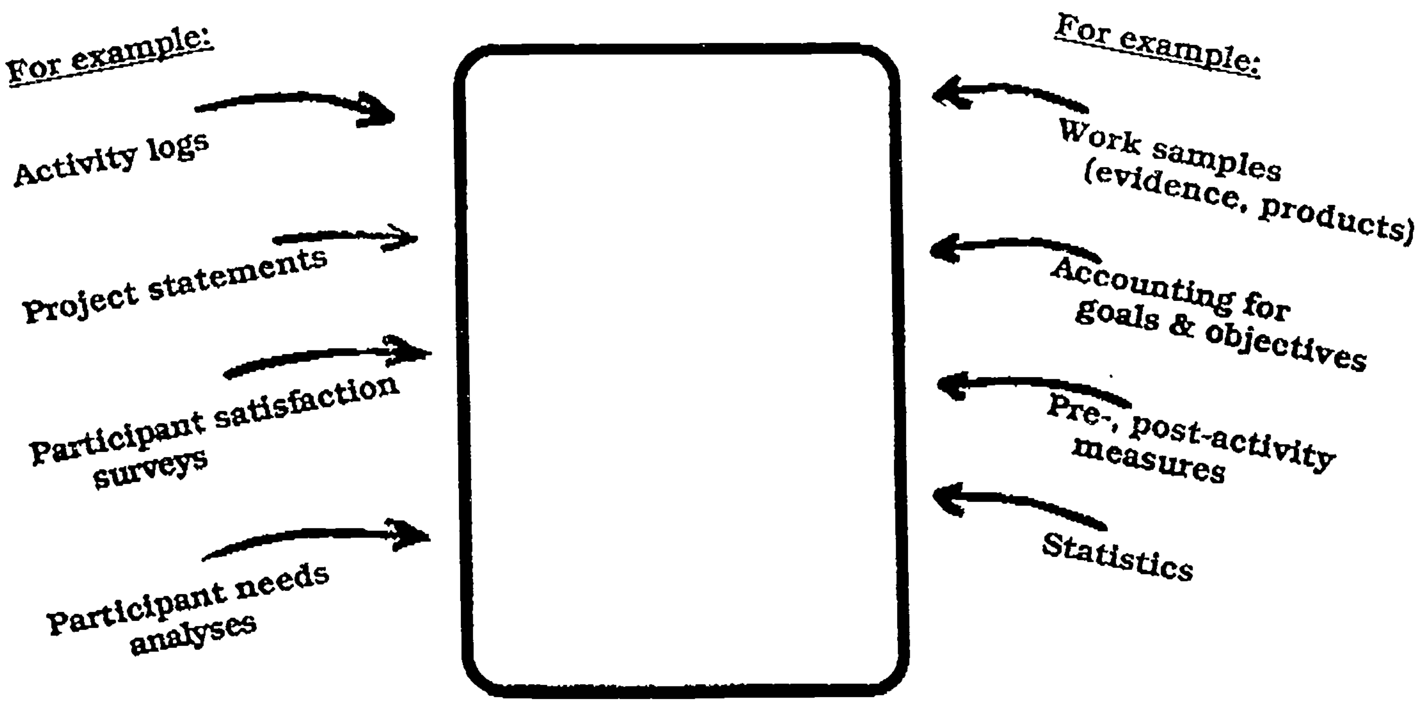
II. What is the purpose of a portfolio?

it will help to:

- -tell the story of your project
- -get feedback to optimize your work
- -monitor, provide accountability
- -show the important ideas in your project
- -build a national economic and political case for more work like yours
- -lead to recommendations for other workers to follow, add to knowledge of effective strategies

III. What goes into a portfolio?

project-selected materials that tell your story
(contents are not uniform for all projects)



IV. List of possible portfolio contents to consider:

what combination will best tell your story?

activity logbook	survey of satisfaction
project statement	prose descriptions
photographs	videotape
newspaper clipping	statistics, graphs, charts
participant satisfaction	needs analyses
standardized tests	pre-, post-tests
questionaires	accounting for objectives
work samples	attitude measures
self-concept data	evidence of production
client statements	testimonials
product checklists	cost data
competitors	bibliographies
case studies	staff, collaborators attitude change
what to do differently	
____________________	____________________

V. Limits to a portfolio

a portfolio is not an unorganized scrapbook

--complex projects have been well represented in less than 18 bound pages, with several pages of appendices. Remember, real people will need to read, understand, and use what is presented.

--some projects may need to include a folder, because of materials that cannot be bound.

--certainly a portfolio should be no more than a small box or carton, even if it contains reports, work samples, and videocassettes.

--slickly produced reports do not make a portfolio impressive; good ideas, important work, support for at risk youth certainly do. Think about what is valuable--flash and polish or projects that enhance the lives and futures of youth? People (the Review Panels) can tell the difference!

VI. Using a portfolio to account for goals and objectives

A. It's important for your project to aim for clear, ambitious, and elevating goals

--summarize your project aims in easy-to-find statements

B. Objectives provide unambiguous, measureable, and easily communicated outcomes as indicators, targets, and foci

--organize (or write) statements about what successful outcomes for your project will enable the youth you serve to do

C. It's important to document attainment of your goals for acknowledgment, emulation, and reassurance

--directly and succinctly show how your goals, activities, and outcome measures link to each other

D. Not all important outcomes are known before your project occurs

--describe the significant but unplanned-for outcomes that make your project valuable and notable

E. Not all your clear, ambitious and elevating goals will be attained

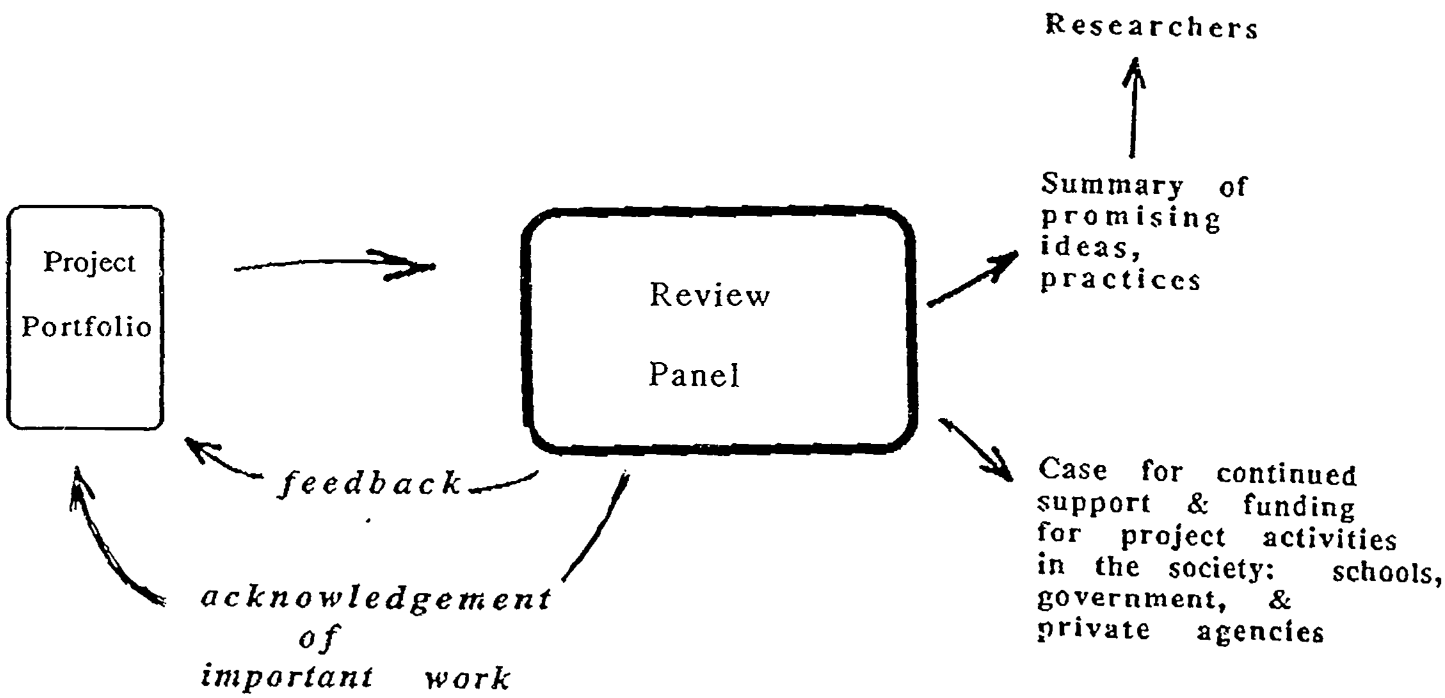
--show the unattained goals and briefly explain what happened

F. It is helpful to account for your original goals and objectives (to learn from your experience and to determine the overall value of your project)

--some goals & objectives attained (what evidence?)
--some partially attained
--some altered (why?)
--some discarded (why?)
--some added (why?)

VII. What happens to portfolios?

they go to national Review Panels



VIII. What are <u>Review Panels</u>?

Review Panels are 8-14 person groups of 4H staff, Center and Project directors, community and participant representatives, scholars and public representatives that look for value, merit and worth in project portfolios.

The purpose of a Review Panel is to judge the value, merit, and impact of your project--and to acknowledge these findings to you. Additionally, the Panel summarizes the successes, promising ideas of all all projects so that these summaries can be sent to researchers and decision-makers in the society.

PORTFOLIO PANEL REVIEW GUIDE

Youth At Risk Initiative

Building Strong Families, Competent Kids, and Caring Communities

December 1-4, 1992
National 4-H Headquarters
Washington, D.C.

YAR PORTFOLIO/PANEL REVIEW WEEK
December 1-5, 1992

Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
10-12 Panel training	**PANEL**	**PANEL**	Focus Group Meetings 9-10:30	Staff Analysis:
			Reliability Study 11-12:30	1. complete & send project feedback forms
			Panel Members Done	2. prepare funders summary report
LUNCH	**REVIEWS**	**REVIEWS**	Staff Break	3. analyze reliability study
Begin Reviews			Staff Analysis:	
			1. check audio tapes	
			2. complete focus group notes	
Q & A Session			3. duplicate audio tapes	

PURPOSES AND EXPECTATIONS

(mailed to participants and presentation: 30 minutes)

The purpose of this panel review is to provide human judgment as a basis for determining the merit, value and worth of the projects as presented in portfolios. Portfolios are collections of reports, information, plans, products, activities, and results. They are assembled by the projects to "best tell their own story." In this panel review process you will be guided to complete the following tasks:

1. Survey and learn about portfolios. First, you will be guided to look through several actual portfolios and to talk about them in small groups of panelists. This will give you a chance to see what's in them, think through some dilemmas about portfolio review, and set a few standards for review.

2. Review the portfolios. You are expected to follow certain instructions, respond to the views of the funders, and communicate your own personal judgment about the adequacy, value and impact of the programs as presented. You are an expert in the area of programs for at risk youth, and thus should take in to account not only the goal statements given you, but your knowledge of needs of at risk youth, sound project organization and functioning, your own knowledge of community dynamics, and realistic expectations for actual programs. Your task is to judge the quality of the programs, and not merely the appearance or quality of the portfolios.

Your judgment especially is needed to determine **appropriateness**. Project designers made certain promises in their proposal goal statements and intended activities. They should be accountable for these objectives and intentions. However, in a hierarchy of value what may be more important than plans is the actual impact of the programs as they happen for at risk youth. Thus, a change of plans in the direction of more effectiveness can be positive. An unintended outcome that receives more attention should be noted and rewarded. Increased learning as a result of experience after the project begins should be supported. Finally, an effective project should not be limited by a less than perfect capacity to write proposals. In all of these situations, your human judgment of appropriate program direction should discern, describe and acknowledge **appropriate** project activity and results which maximizes impact for at risk youth.

3. Recognize and acknowledge impact. You are expected to be an appreciative audience for the efforts of the projects. Your task is to recognize good work and to acknowledge it. The job is to give credit where it is due. Your expertise and experience give you the ability to see quality and to respond to it.

4. Report information for improvement. If you see areas for projects to improve, in planning, activity or reporting, record this valuable insight. Your reactions may be identify problems, show missed opportunities, or give suggestions for changes in action. Report these simply and directly.

5. Share what you learned from the portfolios. Following work on individual portfolios, you will meet in small groups to discuss major ideas from the portfolios as a group. These ideas will be forwarded to researchers and advocates.

6. Your questions?

JUDGING THE VALUE OF PROJECTS[1]

Assumptions: projects are complex, not completely defined, changing and dynamic, contain some unclear but important goals, and vary by view point.

Clients for these projects are youth at risk, coalition members, communities of the youth, society in general, and workers in the projects. The **emphasis in determining value** should be more *client-weighted* than management-*weighted*. That is, your concern should be more for how worthwhile the project was for clients rather than for how well the project was planned, organized, run, monitored, and presented. (These latter concerns have some importance in the overall judgment, just lower priority). There should be more care about value to the client, than mere *merit* in the technical design as seen by the eye of the expert.

Comparisons with other projects (here and elsewhere) are very important in determining value. What other projects are able to do and accomplish, and cost, can be more important for judging value and worth than abstract ideals, theories or principles about working with at risk youth.

Costs for programs are comprehensive and include such things as dollar expenditures, time, volunteer effort, maintenance, activities *displaced* because of what was done, and disruptions of ongoing efforts.

Questions that you *may* want to consider include:

what **difference** for at risk youth did the project make?
what needs were met? what priorities does this population have?
what is remarkable about this project?
what strategies and techniques did the project use? are these defensible?
how did the project document their plans, work, results?
how was money spent? accounted for? was money well spent?
how were project goals and objectives accounted for?
how does this project **compare** with other projects on the above dimensions?
any improvements come to mind? what should the project be praised for?
anything missing in the project, or report?

Valuable programs:

meet ethical and legal expectations,
show clear payoffs for clients (have good outcomes),
have payoffs that last,
meet the demonstrated needs (and priorities) of the target populations,
exhibit practices that logically meet the population needs (good process),
are cost effective,
may produce unexpected positive side effects, but lack unanticipated negative side effects,
have strategies that generalize in their effectiveness to similar problems in other settings,
look good in comparison with competitor programs, and
evaluate their own evaluations.

Your judgment: take into account the best objective data from the portfolios, compare projects on key value questions, apply the standards of state-of-the-art projects of this kind, consider ethical questions raised, and synthesize your value determinations in each case.

[1] a summary of program evaluation ideas of Michael Scriven

FUNDER GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Significant need is defined in terms of risk factors or barriers to youth reaching their full potential. Need is significant when two or more risk factors interact. Risk factors include, but are not limited to: poverty, substance abuse, teen pregnancy, illiteracy, school dropouts, AIDS, and homeless youth.

Role of funded projects:

A. Establish community based programming for youth and families at risk.

B. Build community collaborations that define problems, find solutions and gain effectiveness in the community. Collaboration members should share ownership, work toward common goals, and contribute equally. Collaboration DOES NOT mean Extension runs the program and other agencies/organizations serve as an advisory group.

C. Gain community attention for the need to actively address the needs of youth and families at risk.

D. Demonstrate an interdisciplinary approach from across Extension program areas, university academic units, and where applicable, between 1862 and 1890 institutions.

E. Serve as a model for successful youth development education programs, which requires, among other things, long term, intensive program involvement.

F. Utilize a variety of strategies to make the project self-sustaining after Federal funding ends, and integrate into ongoing community and Extension programming.

G. Increase protective factors and reduce risk factors.

Objectives:

A. Institutionalize Youth At Risk programming to insure program continuation beyond Federal funding, and integration into the community and ongoing Cooperative Extension Service programming.

B. Increase the employability of youth.

C. Enlist the support of local communities, public agencies, the private sector and volunteers to form coalitions and partnerships that strengthen the ecological environment for youth (individual, family, peer, school, work, and community).

D. Involve parents in educational programs which build parenting skills.

E. Develop community-based programs with a major volunteer component that involves youth in planning and implementation.

F. Increase the self confidence and decision making skills of youth to cope with adverse conditions and become mature contributing adults.

G. Reduce the long-term costs to society for medical care, welfare, and incarceration by increasing the proportion of youth who transition into adulthood as productive, capable and contributing citizens.

PORTFOLIO REVIEW

Seventy-five portfolios were submitted for review of the 45 panelists. The panelists were assigned to three work teams. Portfolios were evenly distributed (exception: portfolios from one's own state were not included in any team). Each team had a work room, a facilitator, and informal meeting areas. Panelists were generally encouraged to review portfolios by themselves, make notes and then to gather in pairs or small groups to discuss their findings.

Feedback forms were prepared as carbonless duplicates. Feedback was recommended to be 1-2 liners of noteworthy findings. Panelists were asked to pick two portfolios to "shepherd," a process of more intense review (1-2 hours) and presentation at the summary session on the last day of review. In addition, panelists were asked to review and comment on as many additional portfolios as practical (approximately 5-10 others).

YAR PORTFOLIO FEEDBACK FORM

(please write firmly & clearly)

Project Name, State and Contact:	Focus: SACC Science/Literacy Coalitions
	Year:

What is important/valuable about this project?

What suggestions/ideas do you have for this project?

Focus Group Guide
YAR Portfolio Evaluation Study

Purpose of focus group study:

To extract and synthesize the wisdom of portfolio panel review members on programs for youth at risk. These people will have just completed three days of reading and discussing 20-30 (each group) portfolio descriptions of $100K local, community-based, coalition projects for addressing the needs of youth at risk. Because of their occupational expertise and their most recent experience of immersion in YAR program information, they will be in a position to furnish useful information and perspective for others interested in the topic. In particular, audiences for this information will be: advocates for YAR (project designers, lobbyists), researchers, and community activists.

Size and number of groups:

Total participants: **45**; # groups: **5**; Persons per group: **9**

Questions to be asked:

What strategies, techniques are working to meet the needs of youth at risk?
What questions would you be willing to collaborate with **researchers** in investigating?
What issues, arguments should **advocates** emphasize?

Description of session:

The session should be informal, comfortable and interested in the views of the participants. The sessions are a chance for participants to discuss their views, information and priorities in a social setting. The sessions have some elements of group interviews, but allow for the interaction of the participants. The emphasis should be more the spontaneous interaction of participants, and not over dominated by the moderator. The few questions are to focus the conversation; but the participants should do most of the structuring. Numbers of ideas, development of ideas are key. Moderators should note the relative importance, priority and group reactions to ideas--as well as the ideas themselves.

Duration of groups: 90 minutes (slightly longer at option of moderator)

Setting: Quiet room. Private (or, if large room, unaffected by other group), refreshments available, newsprint & marking pens

Documentation: moderator notes, audio tape

Readings for moderators:

Krueger, R.A. (1988). Moderating skills. In *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research.* (pp. 72-90). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Morgan, D.L. (1988). Conducting and analyzing focus groups. In *Focus groups as qualitative research.* (pp. 53-60). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Stewart, D. & Shamdasani, P. (1990). The focus group moderator; Conducting the focus group. In *Focus groups: Theory and practice.* (pp. 69-86; 87-101). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.