

**Program Evaluation of the 2016 Agricultural Communications Vision Consortium**

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### **Introduction/need for research**

On February 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> in San Antonio, a group of agricultural communications industry professionals, faculty members, and graduate students came together for the 2016 Agricultural Communications Vision Consortium, held in conjunction with the Southern Association of Agriculture Scientists annual convention. The purpose of the consortium was to discuss curriculum, research, and the future of agriculture communications. An external facilitator led the discussion from approximately 70 attendees.

The event began with a panel discussion from agricultural communications industry professionals. The second activity was a stakeholder analysis to determine the audience of ag communications programs. Day Two began with a “speed dating” style discussion of various factors impacting agricultural communications collegiate programs, followed by small group discussion. The event concluded with a discussion of action items from the large group and suggestions for next steps following the event. It was agreed that an open channel of communication between industry and academia is imperative to moving the industry forward. A Higher Education Challenge Grant, from the United States Department of Agriculture, funded the consortium. At the conclusion of the event, the group concluded that writing, followed by visual communications were the core competencies that all degree programs should include. The vision for ag communications research was to be more theoretically grounded and to develop and progress theory.

The purpose of this research was to evaluate participants’ feelings and opinions on the consortium and determine ways to improve future consortiums. This research was guided by two questions: What were the overall opinions of the Agricultural Communications Vision Consortium?; and What measures can event organizers take to improve upon future consortiums?

### **Conceptual or theoretical framework**

This research was conducted through the lens of the Theory of Meeting Satisfaction (Briggs, Vreede, & Reinig, 2003). The theory states that people may feel satisfied with a meeting, as long as the meeting exceeded their expectations for participating. Further, a meeting satisfaction instrument should explicitly ask questions about the meeting process or outcomes (Briggs et al., 2003).

### **Methodology**

The researchers developed an online survey instrument that was emailed all 70 attendees of consortium. The instrument consisted of 27 questions that related to the publicity of the meeting, organization, the facilitator, and activities. Questions were yes/no, short answer, and a Likert-type scale. The instrument was emailed approximately two weeks following the consortium to control for maturation threats to validity. The researchers emailed a reminder two weeks following the initial deployment. A total of 27 responses were received for a response rate of 39%.

### **Results**

Scores related to the overall opinions of the Agricultural Communications Vision Consortium can be found in Table 1. The activities on Day One rated lowest with a mean score of 2.52 ( $SD = 1.22$ ); however the Day Two activities rated highest overall ( $M = 3.92$ ;  $SD = .74$ ).

Table 1. Overall opinions of the Agricultural Communications Vision Consortium.

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Event publicity	3.63	.84
Quality of moderator	3.26	1.02
Benefit of panel discussion	3.33	1.07
Day One activities	2.52	1.22
Day Two activities	3.92	.74
Benefit to ag communications research	2.73	.83
Benefit to ag communications teaching	3.08	.74
Benefit to ag communications industry	2.73	.83

*Note.* Scores based on a five point Likert-type scale with 1 = very low to 5 = very high. *N* = 27.

To determine which measures event organizers could take to improve upon future consortiums, participants answered open-ended questions. Participants wanted to have more discussion of a national agricultural communications research agenda and would like for future consortiums to center around research. Participants really enjoyed the activities during Day Two and said they would prefer more activities like that in future meetings; they also would like more industry involvement. Overwhelmingly, the participants stated that consortiums like this should be hosted every five years.

### Conclusions

The survey showed that most participants thought the meeting was well publicized and organized and that overall the moderator did a good job. The activities and discussions of the second day were better received than the activities and discussions of the first day. However, there is room for improvement.

### Recommendations

For future consortiums, the researchers recommend having a clearly stated goal for the event as a whole. Although the goals were listed in all communications materials about the event, a list of sub-objectives tied to the agenda would help the participants understand how the organizers planned to accomplish the overall goal. This process can be replicated in any discipline looking to bridge the gap between industry and academia, or any group wanting to come to a general consensus on almost any issue affecting a large group. If efforts are continued, the Agricultural Communications Vision Consortium will continue every five years with the goal of facilitating an open line of dialog between academia and the industry helping push the agricultural communications discipline forward. This type of consortium could be adapted for needs in agricultural education, leadership, and/or extension education.

### References

- Briggs, R. O., de Vreede, G.J., & Reinig, B.A. (2003). *A theory and measurement of meeting satisfaction*. Proceedings of the 36<sup>th</sup> Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences, Big Island, HI.