

RESEARCH CONNECTION

Canadian Prairies and the case of shelterbelts

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Why this research is important

Key measures from previously completed programs were used as benchmarks or guides in assessing the likelihood of success in this new program. Given the outcomes of previous efforts and cases, this research explored how such results might be used to help gauge if a new social marketing initiative, the Working Tree program, will be able to achieve their proposed objectives. Such an approach is of great value, as it can inform social marketing program choices and key decisions before or in the early stages of a project's introduction.

This research adds another voice to champion the importance of integrating evaluation and theory-based outcomes, to complete program evaluations, and to share their results. Reporting on evaluation is also an important consideration for investors seeking evidence-based decisions at the pre-launch stage of such a program.

The contribution of this research lies in developing and empirically examining a conceptual framework that

What you need to know

For more than a century, shelterbelts have been integral to directing winds on the prairies. Shelterbelts often combine bushes and trees that deflect winds upwards and outwards to create a sheltered area. Benefits of these working trees include sheltering livestock and farm sites from cold winter weather, improving soil quality, reducing wind speeds, and lowering soil erosion. By targeting farmers, the new Working Tree social marketing program aims to gain benefits from enhancing and expanding on-farm tree shelterbelts on the Canadian prairies. The aim of this research was to use outcome-based evaluations from previously completed social marketing programs to provide insight on whether the proposed Working Tree program might achieve its objectives.

employs evaluation data from social marketing programs to assess a new program at a pre-launch stage. Our conceptual framework builds upon data from program evaluations and equally importantly incorporates social marketing theory and practice from implemented programs. The conceptual framework and method present a novel approach to using evaluation data to guide new program funding and initiatives.

In addition, our conceptual model purposefully links evaluation data with a social marketing theory or theories

as well as accounting for proven practices. Incorporating both theories and proven practices is central to framing a program or strategy in social marketing, as well as informing practice and maximizing their effectiveness.

How the research was conducted

The intention of this research was to link the evaluation of social marketing efforts with rational choice theory and to consider proven practices. To do so, this research used a novel method that relied on secondary data from six completed social marketing cases as data for a comparative analysis to the new program. As a result, a conceptual framework was proposed and applied. This framework incorporates process and outcome indicators of evaluation, key dimensions of the rational choice theory, and proven practices from completed projects.

What the researchers found

This research sought answers to the question: How can previous social marketing efforts help gauge a pre-launch assessment of a Working Tree program? We found that while there may be different ways to respond to this question, none offer a straightforward answer. Using the case-based approach that was adopted here led to some challenges. For example, it would be necessary to ensure that there are sufficient cases that are similar enough to the new program. Equally important would be the ability to access data to calculate meaningful indices describing key measures to help gauge the probability of success of a new program. These could then be reinforced with alignment and/or incorporation of proven practices.

All of this calls for an increased emphasis on evaluating and reporting social marketing cases with sufficient detail and transparency. Templates of suggested formats to report key indicators and quantified objectives might be suggested by researchers and policymakers. As well, case study reporting could be more actively encouraged

by government agencies and funders which join the voices of practitioners.

How this research can be used

This research illustrates the importance of the evaluation stage of the social marketing process. It demonstrates the practicality of being able to effectively draw upon previous evaluations to inform new program investors and social marketers at the pre-launch stage.

When properly completed, evaluations can provide insight into the next round of a program or campaign, inform practices as well as theories, and provide a basis for funding and support of different future programs. Evaluation or the absence of evaluation forms the weak link in practice, and this has not received adequate attention in the academic literature.

About the researchers

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