

## **Leadership Idaho Agriculture: An Examination of Graduates' Perceptions**

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### **Abstract**

The study sought to evaluate a state agricultural leadership program, Leadership Idaho Agriculture (LIA), according to the perceptions of program graduates. Of the 348 graduates from 1993-2001, 246 returned a completed instrument for a total response rate of 70.7%. Participants rated communication skills as the most frequently used skills and public speaking skills as the least frequently used skills emphasized within the LIA program. Participants perceived LIA to have the greatest impact in their career and their ability to set new goals in their careers. Participants reported that the four LIA program objectives were met with an above average success rate or higher but recommended the inclusion of content related to conducting business meetings and conflict management.

## **Introduction and Theoretical Framework**

Agriculture is the lifeblood of civilization and over the centuries, it has evolved. While embracing the advancement of agriculture, many states have questioned how to educate the population in and about agriculture. It was this type of question that led innovative agriculturalists in Idaho to develop Leadership Idaho Agriculture (LIA).

The LIA program, like many state agricultural leadership programs, was patterned after those that originally emerged through support from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF). Based on the success of the original WKKF program, the Kellogg Farmers Study Program at Michigan State University, and the three other WKKF demonstration programs that emerged in the early 1970s, 12 additional states and a consortium of six New England states received support to establish agricultural leadership programs. While the LIA program is not one of the programs that received WKKF support, it is one of 38 programs that exist today, including 28 existing state programs, four emerging U. S. programs, and six international programs (WKKF, 2001).

While some discussions regarding the benefits of LIA have been conducted with program graduates (Pratt, Waitley, & Mundt, 1996), LIA has conducted no formal program evaluation. The mission of LIA is to prepare leaders in agriculture and rural communities through education and experience as guided by four main objectives: (1) improve personal leadership skills, enhance self-confidence, and develop agricultural and natural resource awareness, (2) encourage a network of leaders to take an active leadership role in a community, state and national issues, (3) promote state agriculture and the development of strong rural communities, and (4) continue to build a network of informed, trained and motivated rural leaders in the state. LIA is a four-week course conducted over four months. Approximately 30 participants spend one week a month in four different locations in the state. The curriculum consists of six major areas: agricultural awareness, networking, leadership, communication, professional development, and the legislative process (Patten, 2005). Within these areas, many skills needed by agricultural leaders are emphasized, six of which are easily identifiable: communication skills, decision-making skills, leadership skills, public professionalism, etiquette, and public speaking skills (Patten). To date, over 500 individuals have graduated from LIA, yet no formal data have been collected to accurately describe the perceptions of graduates related to the impact and value of the program.

Cronbach et al. (1981) defined evaluation as the "...systematic examination of events occurring in and consequent on a contemporary program—an examination conducted to assist in improving this program..." (p. 14). Conceptually, program evaluation involves answering questions such as "Did this program meet its objectives?" or "What should be done the same and what should be done differently next time?" Ultimately, "educational evaluation is the process of making judgments about the merit, value, or worth of educational programs" (Borg & Gall, 1989, p. 742). Evaluations are done for a number of reasons, one of which helps program managers generate data that will help them make decisions related to the design of a program (Borg & Gall). According to Taylor (1977), no educational program should be stalemated due to lack of current information from graduates that could provide insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the program and suggest areas for improvement.

Evaluation studies should satisfy four criteria: utility, feasibility, propriety, and accuracy (Borg & Gall, 1989). For a study to satisfy the utility criteria, it should be informative, timely, and useful to the affected persons. To satisfy the feasibility criteria, a study should be appropriate to the setting in which it is to be conducted and cost-effective. Evaluation studies meet the propriety criteria if the rights of the affected persons are protected. To satisfy the accuracy criteria, studies must produce valid, reliable, and comprehensive information about the entity being evaluated. These four criteria served as the basis for investigation into the LIA program. By evaluating the impact of the LIA program according to graduates of the program using an evaluation that meets these criteria, the LIA Foundation Board of Directors can use the findings to determine its course for the future.

### **Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this study, conducted as part of a larger study, was to evaluate the LIA program according to the perceptions of program graduates. The specific objectives of this study were to:

2. Describe the continued use of selected skills emphasized in the LIA program by LIA graduates.
3. Describe the perceived impact of participation in the LIA program on program graduates.
4. Identify suggestions for program and curriculum changes.
5. Describe perceptions of LIA graduates regarding time invested in the program.

## **Methods and Procedures**

### ***Population and Sample***

The population for this study consisted of LIA graduates from 1993 through 2001. Due to a lack of consistency in program curriculum and format, graduates from classes prior to 1993 were excluded from the study. The total population frame included 348 graduates.

### ***Instrumentation***

Data were collected using a survey instrument. The section of the instrument used in this study was developed by the researchers and consisted of questions designed to gather data related to the effectiveness of the current LIA curriculum, suggestions for curriculum changes, and the value of the LIA experience to participants. Content and face validity of the instrument were established by a panel of experts made up of university faculty, leadership program coordinators, and former LIA graduates not included in the study.

### ***Data Collection and Analysis***

A cover letter, the instrument, and a stamped return envelope were mailed to participants. Instruments were coded with individual identification numbers for follow-up purposes and participants were removed from the database used for future contacts as completed instruments were received. In an effort to increase response rate, replacement instruments were mailed to nonresponders three weeks after the initial mailing and a final replacement instrument was mailed three weeks after the second mailing to those who had still not responded.

Usable data were obtained from 246 individuals for an overall response rate of 70.7%. Nonresponse error was addressed by comparing early and late responders (Ary, Jacob, & Razawieh, 1996; Lindner, Murphy, & Briers, 2001; Miller & Smith, 1983). No statistical differences were found in the responses of early responders as compared to late responders.

Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations, and Friedman's Mean Rank (FMR) were used. FMR, a non-parametric rank-based procedure similar to analysis of variance, was used to more accurately describe the ordinal scales used in this study.

## Results

The first objective was to describe the continued use of selected skills emphasized in the LIA program by graduates. Participants rated the frequency in which they used the skills within one year of graduating from the LIA program (see Table 1). Communication skills (FMR=4.29) were rated highest, followed by decision-making skills (FMR=4.12), leadership skills (FMR=3.73), public professionalism (FMR=3.70), etiquette (FMR=2.80), and public speaking skills (FMR=2.35). The majority (64.7%,  $n=156$ ) reported they used communication skills greater than 21 times a year, while 20.3% ( $n=49$ ) reported using them 16-20 times a year, 10.8% ( $n=26$ ) reported using them 11-15 times a year, 4.1% ( $n=10$ ) reported using them 6-10 times a year, and no one ( $n=0$ ) reported not using them at all. In contrast, slightly more than one-quarter (28.5%,  $n=69$ ) reported using public speaking skills greater than 21 times a year, while 12.0% ( $n=29$ ) reported using public speaking skills 16-20 times a year, 16.5% ( $n=40$ ) reported using them 11-15 times a year, slightly less than one-quarter (23.6%,  $n=57$ ) reported using them 6-10 times a year, and 19.4% ( $n=47$ ) reported using them 0-5 times a year.

Table 1. Participants' indication of the frequency in which they used certain LIA skill areas within a year

LIA Skill Areas	Value Label	<i>f</i>	Valid %	FMR <sup>a</sup>	Rank
Communication <sup>b</sup>	1	0	0.0	4.29	1
	2	10	4.1		
	3	26	10.8		
	4	49	20.3		
	5	156	64.7		
Decision-Making <sup>c</sup>	1	5	2.1	4.12	2
	2	14	5.8		
	3	29	12.1		
	4	32	13.3		
	5	160	66.7		
Leadership <sup>c</sup>	1	2	0.8	3.73	3
	2	24	10.0		
	3	31	12.9		
	4	61	25.4		
	5	122	50.8		
Public Professionalism <sup>d</sup>	1	5	2.1	3.70	4
	2	18	7.5		
	3	42	17.6		
	4	56	23.4		
	5	118	49.4		
Etiquette <sup>c</sup>	1	16	6.7	2.80	5
	2	39	16.3		
	3	63	26.3		
	4	42	17.5		
	5	80	33.3		
Public Speaking <sup>e</sup>	1	47	19.4	2.35	6
	2	57	23.6		
	3	40	16.5		
	4	29	12.0		
	5	69	28.5		

Note. Value Label: 1 = 0-5 (times within a year), 2 = 6-10, 3 = 11-15, 4 = 16-20, 5 = 21 or more.

<sup>a</sup>*n* = 237. <sup>b</sup>*n* = 241. <sup>c</sup>*n* = 240. <sup>d</sup>*n* = 239. <sup>e</sup>*n* = 242.

The second objective was to describe the perceived impact of participation in the LIA program on program graduates. Table 2 presents the participants' ratings related to the areas of their life that LIA had the greatest impact. Participants rated the area of career (FMR=5.03) with the highest impact, followed by personal (FMR=4.26), political (FMR=4.03), community involvement (FMR=4.01), advanced leadership training (FMR=3.84), volunteer service (FMR=3.77), and continuing education (FMR=3.05). In the career area, over one-quarter (28.3%,  $n=68$ ) of the 240 respondents reported that LIA had a high impact, 37.5% ( $n=90$ ) reported a moderate impact, less than one-quarter (23.8%,  $n=57$ ) reported some impact, 9.6% ( $n=23$ ) reported very little impact, and 0.8% ( $n=2$ ) reported no impact at all. In the lowest ranking area, continuing education, only 5.8% ( $n=14$ ) of the 240 who responded reported a high impact, while one-quarter (25.0%,  $n=60$ ) reported moderate impact, almost one-third (32.9%,  $n=79$ ) reported some impact, more than one-quarter (27.5%,  $n=66$ ) reported very little impact, and 8.8% ( $n=21$ ) reported no impact at all.

Table 2. Participants' indication of the life areas that LIA had the greatest impact

Impact Areas	Value Label	<i>f</i>	Valid %	FMR <sup>a</sup>	Rank
Career <sup>b</sup>	0	2	0.8	5.03	1
	1	23	9.6		
	2	57	23.8		
	3	90	37.5		
	4	68	28.3		
Personal <sup>c</sup>	0	6	2.5	4.26	2
	1	27	11.2		
	2	77	32.0		
	3	101	41.9		
	4	30	12.4		
Political <sup>c</sup>	0	11	4.6	4.03	3
	1	41	17.0		
	2	80	33.2		
	3	71	29.5		
	4	38	15.8		
Community Involvement <sup>b</sup>	0	6	2.5	4.01	4
	1	35	14.6		
	2	93	38.8		
	3	81	33.8		
	4	25	10.4		
Advanced Leadership Training <sup>b</sup>	0	21	8.8	3.84	5
	1	43	17.9		
	2	75	31.3		
	3	61	25.4		
	4	40	16.7		
Volunteer Service <sup>b</sup>	0	4	1.7	3.77	6
	1	46	19.2		
	2	91	37.9		
	3	77	32.1		
	4	22	9.2		
Continuing Education <sup>b</sup>	0	21	8.8	3.05	7
	1	66	27.5		
	2	79	32.9		
	3	60	25.0		
	4	14	5.8		

*Note.* Value Label: 0 = No Impact, 1 = Very Little Impact, 2 = Some Impact, 3 = Moderate Impact, 4 = High Impact.

<sup>a</sup>*n* = 238. <sup>b</sup>*n* = 240. <sup>c</sup>*n* = 241.

Participants rated the areas of their life that LIA had an impact on in terms of goal setting (see Table 3). Participants rated the area of career (FMR=5.14) as having the highest impact on setting new goals, followed by personal (FMR=4.60), advanced leadership training (FMR=4.01), community involvement (FMR=3.92), political (FMR=3.73), volunteer service (FMR=3.48), and continuing education (FMR=3.11) as the lowest area of impact on setting new goals. Of the 186 respondents to the career area question, slightly less than one-third (32.3%,  $n=60$ ) reported that LIA had a high impact, 41.9% ( $n=78$ ) reported a moderate impact, 19.4% ( $n=36$ ) reported some impact, 5.9% ( $n=11$ ) reported very little impact, and 0.5% ( $n=1$ ) reported no impact on goal setting at all. In the lowest ranking area, continuing education, only 11.8% ( $n=22$ ) of the 187 responding participants reported a high impact, 21.9% ( $n=41$ ) reported moderate impact, one-third (33.7%,  $n=63$ ) reported some impact, 24.6% ( $n=46$ ) reported very little impact, and 8.0% ( $n=15$ ) reported no impact at all.

The third objective was to identify suggestions for program and curriculum changes. Participants rated the success of LIA in accomplishing its program objectives (see Table 4). The program objective to continue to build a network of informed, trained and motivated rural leaders in Idaho (FMR=2.67) was ranked as the most successfully accomplished objective by participants, followed by the objective to improve personal leadership skills, enhance self-confidence, and develop agriculture and natural resource awareness (FMR=2.57), and the objective to promote Idaho agriculture and the development of strong rural communities (FMR=2.41). The least successfully accomplished objective as reported by participants was the objective to encourage a network of leaders to take an active role in community, state, and national issues (FMR=2.35). Of the 229 respondents to highest ranked objective, to continue to build a network of informed, trained and motivated rural leaders in Idaho, almost half (49.8%,  $n=114$ ) reported LIA was highly successful in accomplishing the objective, more than one-third (37.6%,  $n=86$ ) reported above average success, 10.9% ( $n=25$ ) reported average success, 1.3% ( $n=3$ ) reported moderately successful, and only 0.4% ( $n=1$ ) reported the LIA program was not successful at all in accomplishing this objective. The lowest ranked objective, to encourage a network of leaders to take an active role in community, state, and national issues, was reported by 38.9% ( $n=89$ ) of the 229 responding participants as being highly successfully accomplished, while 41.9% ( $n=96$ ) of the participants reported the objective was met with above average success, 16.6% ( $n=38$ ) reported average success, 2.6% ( $n=6$ ) reported moderately successful, and no participants (0.0%,  $n=0$ ) reported that the LIA program was not successful at all in accomplishing this objective.

Table 3. Participants indication of areas that LIA had the greatest impact on goals

Impact Area	Value Label	<i>f</i>	Valid %	FMR <sup>a</sup>	Rank
Career <sup>b</sup>	0	1	0.5	5.14	1
	1	11	5.9		
	2	36	19.4		
	3	78	41.9		
	4	60	32.3		
Personal <sup>c</sup>	0	1	0.5	4.60	2
	1	17	8.9		
	2	56	29.5		
	3	69	36.3		
	4	47	24.7		
Advanced Leadership Training <sup>d</sup>	0	9	4.8	4.01	3
	1	29	15.5		
	2	55	29.4		
	3	62	33.2		
	4	32	17.1		
Community Involvement <sup>e</sup>	0	2	1.1	3.92	4
	1	31	16.5		
	2	66	35.1		
	3	64	34.0		
	4	25	13.3		
Political <sup>f</sup>	0	9	4.8	3.73	5
	1	38	20.1		
	2	55	29.1		
	3	61	32.3		
	4	26	13.8		
Volunteer Service <sup>f</sup>	0	6	3.2	3.48	6
	1	39	20.6		
	2	70	37.0		
	3	56	29.6		
	4	18	9.5		
Continuing Education <sup>d</sup>	0	15	8.0	3.11	7
	1	46	24.6		
	2	63	33.7		
	3	41	21.9		
	4	22	11.8		

Value Label: 0 = No Impact, 1 = Very Little Impact, 2 = Some Impact, 3 = Moderate Impact, 4 = High Impact.

<sup>a</sup>*n* = 183. <sup>b</sup>*n* = 186. <sup>c</sup>*n* = 190. <sup>d</sup>*n* = 187. <sup>e</sup>*n* = 188. <sup>f</sup>*n* = 189.

Table 4

Participants' indication of how successfully the LIA program objectives were accomplished

LIA Program Objectives	Value Label	<i>f</i>	Valid %	FMR <sup>a</sup>	Rank
Continue to build a network of informed, trained and motivated rural leaders in Idaho <sup>b</sup>	0	1	0.4	2.67	1
	1	3	1.3		
	2	25	10.9		
	3	86	37.6		
	4	114	49.8		
Improve personal leadership skills, enhance self-confidence, and develop agriculture and natural resource awareness <sup>a</sup>	0	0	0.0	2.57	2
	1	2	0.9		
	2	18	7.9		
	3	113	49.6		
	4	95	41.7		
Promote Idaho agriculture and the development of strong rural communities <sup>a</sup>	0	2	0.9	2.41	3
	1	4	1.8		
	2	39	17.1		
	3	82	36.0		
	4	101	44.3		
Encourage a network of leaders to take an active leadership role in community, state, and national issues <sup>b</sup>	0	0	0.0	2.35	4
	1	6	2.6		
	2	38	16.6		
	3	96	41.9		
	4	89	38.9		

Note. Value Label: 1 = Not Successful, 2 = Moderately Successful, 3 = Average Success, 4 = Above Average Success, 5 = Highly Successful.

<sup>a</sup>*n* = 228. <sup>b</sup>*n* = 229.

Participants rated the LIA curriculum areas in terms of whether more or less emphasis should be placed on them in the program (see Table 5). Participants ranked the LIA curriculum area of communication (FMR=3.78) the highest in terms of more emphasis needed, followed by leadership (FMR=3.74), professional development (FMR=3.49), legislative process (FMR=3.39), and the curriculum areas of agricultural awareness (FMR=3.30) and networking (FMR=3.30) tied as areas with the least need for emphasis. Of the 240 who responded to the emphasis that should be placed on the communication area, 41.7% (*n*=100) reported the need for more emphasis in the LIA curriculum, the majority (57.5%, *n*=138) reported the need for the same emphasis, and only 0.8% (*n*=2) reported the need for less emphasis on communication. The two lowest ranked curriculum areas were agricultural awareness and networking. In the area

of agricultural awareness, slightly more than one-quarter (25.9%,  $n=62$ ) of the 239 responding participants reported the need for more emphasis, almost three-quarters (72.0%,  $n=172$ ) reported the need for the same emphasis, and only 2.1% ( $n=5$ ) reported the need for less emphasis on agricultural awareness in the curriculum. Similarly, in the area of networking, one-quarter (25.6%,  $n=61$ ) of the 238 responding participants reported the need for more emphasis, almost three-quarters (73.5%,  $n=175$ ) reported the need for the same emphasis, and only 0.8% ( $n=2$ ) reported the need for less emphasis in the curriculum area of networking.

Table 5. Participants' indication of emphasis that should be placed on the areas of the LIA curriculum

Areas of LIA Curriculum	Value Label	<i>f</i>	Valid %	FMR <sup>a</sup>	Rank
Communication <sup>b</sup>	1	2	0.8	3.78	1
	2	138	57.5		
	3	100	41.7		
Leadership <sup>b</sup>	1	2	0.8	3.74	2
	2	140	58.3		
	3	98	40.8		
Professional Development <sup>b</sup>	1	4	1.7	3.49	3
	2	159	66.3		
	3	77	32.1		
Legislative Process <sup>b</sup>	1	3	1.3	3.39	4
	2	166	69.2		
	3	71	29.6		
Agricultural Awareness <sup>c</sup>	1	5	2.1	3.30	5
	2	172	72.0		
	3	62	25.9		
Networking <sup>a</sup>	1	2	0.8	3.30	5
	2	175	73.5		
	3	61	25.6		

Note. Value Label: 1 = Less Emphasis, 2 = The Same, 3 = More Emphasis.

<sup>a</sup> $n = 238$ . <sup>b</sup> $n = 240$ . <sup>c</sup> $n = 239$ .

Participants also rated areas not in the LIA curriculum according to their level of interest toward each area being integrated into the curriculum (see Table 6).

Participants ranked the area not in the LIA curriculum of conducting business meetings (FMR=4.02) the highest, followed by conflict management (FMR=3.99), time management (FMR=3.42), stress management (FMR=3.36), interpersonal communication (FMR=3.11), and parliamentary procedure

(FMR=3.10). The majority (64.5%,  $n=156$ ) of the 242 respondents to the conducting business meetings question reported they were highly interested in its integration, slightly less than one-third (30.6%,  $n=74$ ) reported they were somewhat interested, and only 5.0% ( $n=12$ ) reported they were not interested at all in the integration of conducting business meetings in the LIA curriculum. In contrast, within the lowest ranked curriculum area of parliamentary procedure 39.9% ( $n=97$ ) of the 243 respondents reported that they were highly interested in its integration, less than half (44.0%,  $n=107$ ) reported they were somewhat interested, and 16.0% ( $n=39$ ) reported they were not interested at all in the integration of parliamentary procedure.

The fourth objective sought to describe perceptions of LIA graduates regarding the time invested in the program. Participants responded to whether they believed the investment of time in the LIA program was worth the return (see Table 7). The majority (61.9%,  $n=151$ ) of participants reported they strongly agreed that their investment of time to LIA was worth the return, slightly less than one-third (31.6%,  $n=77$ ) reported they agreed, 4.9% ( $n=12$ ) reported they somewhat agreed, 0.4% ( $n=1$ ) reported they disagreed, and 0.4% ( $n=1$ ) reported they strongly disagreed their investment of time to LIA was worth the return.

Table 6. Participants' indication of their level of interest in areas that are not part of the current LIA curriculum

Areas not in the LIA Curriculum	Value Label	<i>f</i>	Valid %	FMR <sup>a</sup>	Rank
Conducting Business Meetings <sup>b</sup>	0	12	5.0	4.02	1
	1	74	30.6		
	2	156	64.5		
Conflict Management <sup>c</sup>	0	6	2.5	3.99	2
	1	87	35.8		
	2	150	61.7		
Time Management <sup>d</sup>	0	19	7.9	3.42	3
	1	115	47.7		
	2	107	44.4		
Stress Management <sup>b</sup>	0	34	14.0	3.36	4
	1	91	37.6		
	2	117	48.3		
Interpersonal Communication <sup>d</sup>	0	24	10.0	3.11	5
	1	131	54.4		
	2	86	35.7		
Parliamentary Procedure <sup>c</sup>	0	39	16.0	3.10	6
	1	107	44.0		
	2	97	39.9		

*Note.* Value Label: 0 = Not Interested, 1 = Somewhat Interested, 2 = Highly Interested.

<sup>a</sup>*n* = 240. <sup>b</sup>*n* = 242. <sup>c</sup>*n* = 243. <sup>d</sup>*n* = 241.

Table 7. Participants' indication of the worth of the investment of time committed to LIA compared to the return

Time Investment	Value Labels	<i>f</i>	%
Investment of time is worth the return	1	1	0.4
	2	1	0.4
	3	12	4.9
	4	77	31.6
	5	151	61.9

*Note.* Value Label: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Somewhat Agree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree.

*n* = 242.

## **Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations**

Participants ranked communication as the highest utilized and public speaking the least utilized of the skills emphasized in the LIA curriculum and included in this study. The LIA curriculum spends a significant amount of time on public speaking, and therefore, it is recommended that the LIA curriculum be examined to determine if less time should be spent on public speaking. It may be that because of obvious overlaps, these two areas can be integrated to a higher degree with less emphasis on public speaking and more emphasis on communication skills, while at the same time increasing the confidence of graduates related to both areas.

LIA had the greatest perceived impact on participants' life and setting new goals in the career and personal areas and the least perceived impact in their life and setting new goals in the area of continuing education. Participants were asked to rate the perceived impact that LIA had on seven areas of their life: career, personal, political, community involvement, advanced leadership training, volunteer service, and continuing education. Based on FMR, the areas were ranked in the following order from highest to lowest: career, personal, political, community involvement, advanced leadership training, volunteer service, and continuing education. These findings suggest LIA may impact participants in their chosen career, but may not impact them as greatly to continue their education. This may be due to the fact that 92.1% (n=198) of the LIA graduates that responded to the survey had an education above the high school level. This may indicate participants have achieved the level of continuing education they desire, or it may be the lack of understanding the definition of continuing education. Participants could have interpreted continuing education as a formal university setting or an informal workshop or summer in-service. Participants were also asked to rate the same set of seven areas listed above based on their perceived impact on the participants' ability to set new goals. FMR revealed similar results with career being ranked highest and continuing education being ranked the lowest area. However, the order of ranking for the seven areas was slightly different. The ranking from highest area to the lowest area was: career, personal, advanced leadership training, community involvement, political, volunteer service, and continuing education. When ranking the impact LIA had on the seven areas of their life, the area of political had a higher ranking than advanced leadership training. When ranking the impact LIA had on the seven areas of their life in setting new goals, the area of political had a lower ranking than advanced leadership training. In essence, the two areas switched rankings. This finding may suggest that LIA had a greater perceived impact on participants' political awareness, but not necessarily on the participants' desire to set new goals in this

area. However, after completing the LIA program, the participants had a greater desire to set new goals for advanced leadership training. It is recommended that LIA examine the possibilities of offering advanced leadership training.

According to participants, LIA was accomplishing the program's objectives at an above average success rate or higher. The percentage of participants that reported an above average to high success ranged from a low of 80.3% ( $n=183$ ) with respect to the promote state agriculture and the development of strong rural communities objective to a high of 91.3% ( $n=208$ ) with respect to the improve personal leadership skills, enhance self-confidence, and develop agriculture and natural resource awareness objective. However, this study did not measure the participants' awareness of the objectives during their participation in the program. Furthermore, LIA program objectives were not examined for their relevance and measurability of current agricultural leadership needs within the state. It is recommended that LIA examine the program objectives and determine if there is a need for change.

The majority of participants reported the need for the same emphasis in all six curricular areas with a low of 57.5% ( $n=240$ ) in the area of communication to a high of 73.5% ( $n=238$ ) in the area of networking. While the majority of the participants reported the need to have the same emphasis on all six areas, approximately 40% of the participants felt the need for more emphasis in the areas of communication and leadership. Thus, while participants felt as though the objectives were being met, there was room for increased emphasis in at least two of the six program skill areas. Given the fact that LIA was shown to impact the goal setting of participants in the area of advanced leadership training, it is not unexpected that they would also indicate a need for more emphasis in the leadership area of the curriculum. Therefore, additional instruction/activities related to both leadership and communication should be developed and incorporated into the experiences available to LIA participants.

The LIA program requires a significant investment of time. Of the participants reporting, 93.5% ( $n=228$ ) agreed or strongly agreed that their investment of time in LIA was worth the return. It is recommended that LIA continue with the current program format in terms of length of time and location.

Findings of this study offer insight into areas of improvement through the suggested implementation of additional curriculum topics. The majority (64.5%,  $n=156$ ) of the participants were highly interested in the area of conducting business meetings and 61.7% ( $n=150$ ) were highly interested in the area of conflict management. It is surprising to note that while 64.5% were highly

interested in the conducting business meetings area, 16.0% ( $n=39$ ) were not interested at all in parliamentary procedure area. Due to similarities and overlaps, this finding may suggest that participants were unclear as to the definitions of one or more of the seven areas. It is recommended that LIA implement conducting business meetings and conflict management into its current curriculum.

While this study provided valuable insight into the LIA program, several questions about the program and its effectiveness impacting participants' leadership behaviors and abilities still remain. It is recommended that further studies be conducted as described below:

- Findings of this study showed perceived changes in participants due to participation in LIA, but it did not show why participants were attracted to the program. Qualitative research should be conducted using LIA graduates to determine what attracts people to participate in LIA.
- Further qualitative research should be conducted to gather richer data to more thoroughly evaluate graduates' perception of willingness to accept leadership responsibilities due to LIA participation.

Inquiry into the research areas listed above would enrich the LIA program and continue building positive relationships with current and future stakeholders and investors.

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### **Biography**

Lori Moore is an assistant professor in the Department of Agricultural and Extension Education at the University of Idaho. She received her Ph.D. from the University of Florida in 2003 where she specialized in agricultural leadership and teacher education. She earned her M.S. degree in Animal Science and B.S. degree in Agricultural Science from Texas A&M University. Her professional experience began as a high school agricultural science teacher in Texas, where she taught for four years. Throughout her career as an educator, she has taught a variety of leadership courses.

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