

AAACE Changed Our Lives: NPAC and Agricultural Communication in the '50s

Mason E. Miller

The recent death of Stanley Andrews, director of the National Project in Agricultural Communications (NPAC) during the 1950s recalls the excitement and energy of those times when the American Association of Agricultural College Editors (AAACE), the precursor of ACE, brought NPAC into existence. How NPAC came to be, and the various programs it developed with and for AAACE, are outlined. Testimonials from editors and administrators of that day are presented to give some idea of the impacts NPAC had on agricultural editors, on ACE, and on editors' place in the land-grant system and in international communication.

Introduction

News of the death Dec. 31, 1994, of Stanley Andrews at age 100 brought to mind a time during the 1950s when ACE—then the American Association of Agricultural College Editors—did something that forever changed the world of agricultural communication: AAACE created the National Project in Agricultural Communications (NPAC), and the NPAC board named Stanley Andrews as its director.

AAACE

The years following WWII were exciting—a time of great change and challenge, of great opportunity. As never before, business, labor,

Mason E. Miller retired in 1987 as head of Winrock International Communications. He had been director of communication for USDA's Cooperative State Research Service, served in various communication and training positions at Michigan State University, and was experiment stations editor at Washington State College. In 1960, he wrote a history for the National Project in Agricultural Communications (NPAC)—"The First Seven Years—NPAC"—while working on his doctorate in Communication at MSU.

government, and the public turned to the universities for help with problems and projects.

In this foment, a relatively new but as yet poorly defined profession of "agricultural editor" was emerging, although there had been agricultural editors at land-grant universities before WWII. My father was a member of AAACE and the experiment station editor at Colorado State College in the 1930s. But when I became experiment station editor at Washington State College in 1949, our tasks already were different from those my father handled.

Staffs originally comprised of editors and writers now included radio, audiovisual, and TV specialists, as well as graphic artists and photographers. These staffs represented the range of old and new media available to reach people with the educational and informational programs of the land-grant institutions.

Both external and internal communication needs increased in the land-grant system. There were more administrators, more extension specialists and county agents, more researchers and professors—all demanding their cut of the information worker's time and talents. And their tasks posed new challenges.

Information staffs mushroomed in size and diversity. Most new staff, coming into the system from commercial media, found the challenges and tasks differed from those they had known in the media. The editor not only had to be skilled in production and marketing of media materials, but was called on to help extension workers, researchers, and administrators plan informational and educational materials and campaigns. This meant more clearly identifying audiences and specifying educational objectives. It became important to be able to predict the potential impact of communication materials and efforts.

Extension specialists and agents, working in the same media climate as did the state ag editors, turned to their editors for help. But most editors had little experience in teaching or training others, had few suitable teaching materials, and were not sure how to go about doing the job most effectively.

Agricultural editors needed help. Their professional organization, AAACE, was not prepared to provide the needed professional improvement opportunities. However, the area of communication theory and research was emerging in the academic community. In its early forms, it usually combined contributions from such disciplines as journalism, sociology, psychology, engineering, and social psychology. Editors looked to this combining of disciplines as a potential source of guidance in using media to educate and inform people.

At the 1951 AAACE meeting on the University of Illinois campus, the AAACE board of directors authorized the professional improvement committee to investigate the possibility of establishing a nationwide project in professional improvement. The die was cast.

AAACE quickly found it could not realize its desires on its own. It sought the approval and support of other groups—ESCOP (Experiment Station Committee on Organization and Policy), ECOP (Extension Committee on Organization and Policy), NARFD (National Association of Radio Farm Directors), and AAEA (American Agricultural Editors Association).

The AAACE committee also talked with officers of the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. In November, 1952, the final proposal moved through ESCOP, ECOP, the American Association of Land-Grant Colleges and State Universities (AALGCSU) Executive Committee, and to the Academic Senate.

The proposal for a 5-year project went to the W. K. Kellogg Foundation in January 1953. On February 7, the Board of Control had its first formal meeting, selected a permanent chair, and set up a screening committee to choose the NPAC director. Stanley Andrews, who had most recently been head of the Technical Cooperation Administration in Washington, D.C., was their choice. With his appointment, NPAC was underway.

Over the next seven years, during which NPAC operated with full programs, the foundation provided three separate grants totalling almost \$750,000. This was nearly two-thirds of NPAC's income. The rest came from enrollment fees for participants in training and sales of NPAC-produced materials.

There were three major activities in the NPAC program: communication training, communication research, and home economics communication.

National Project in Agricultural Communications (NPAC) Communication Training

The largest activity was Communication Training (CT). The focus on "train-the-trainer" got its impetus from a number of editors who had taught communication at the regional Extension Service summer schools. They wanted help in how to teach, sought suitable materials, and needed some new ideas on how to teach effectively.

Thus the train-the-trainer program was at the forefront of NPAC and AAACE thinking about training in communication. The western regional agricultural economics writing short courses, conducted in the early years of NPAC, provided a good laboratory for testing the concept's viability.

Four communication training units were developed: Basic, Oral, Written, and Visual. Each program was complete in itself. Each brought together the latest information, research, and art for the given topic; assembled a talented staff to teach the material; and focused the instruction not only on learning new information, ideas, and skills, but also on skills to improve teaching others.

Participant teams from land-grant institutions—including editors, extension specialists, and administrators—received training in how to teach, were supported with materials, and helped to plan for communication training back home.

George Beal, Iowa State University rural sociologist, who, along with Joseph Bolen developed the Social Action and Information Diffusion models used in NPAC programs, says a number of factors contributed to NPAC's success:

The recognition that communication is an interdisciplinary process and needs an interdisciplinary training approach; involving academics, extension specialists and people from the field staff from the beginning in planning; the 'train-the-trainer' process; packaging materials that were adaptable for a wide variety of field situations; help from the commercial world to design and package material; in-state administrative support for the training to be carried out; and followup with the trainers and their training programs.

Participation by land-grant institutions was voluntary. Staff from all but eight states participated in the Basic and Oral training. All but 12 later had staff enrolled in the Written unit. Each state paid for enrollment of its participants and their take-home materials.

NPAC training also had international implications. A number of CT participants came from abroad. A Spanish adaptation of the Basic and Oral units was produced at the Interamerican Institute for Agricultural Sciences (IICA), Turrialba, Costa Rica, for Latin American participants. Later, NPAC also adapted the Written unit for IICA.

NPAC was involved in another CT adaptation—for the International Cooperation Administration (ICA), predecessor to the present Agency for International Development (AID). ICA contracted with NPAC to establish a continuing short-term (one week) program to help foreign trainees and students prepare for returning home and successfully applying there what they had learned. Working with the College of Communication Arts at Michigan State University, NPAC developed the program. During the next 20 years, ICA (later known as AID) contracted with MSU to conduct 20-25 weeks of training each year, serving some 30,000 participants from 100 countries. Many AAACE members served as workshop staff, recruited on a weekly basis from their home institutions.

Communication Research

The second major NPAC effort involved communication-related research. A research director—one of the early additions to the NPAC staff—developed a program to familiarize agricultural information workers with research techniques and results, to encourage them to interpret and set up research, and to show them how research results could be applied.

Limited resources again led NPAC to seek ways to multiply programs and effects. Much of the interest in and research performance by ACE members today can be traced to NPAC's research stimulus.

Home Economics Communication

The primary focus of a small program with home economists was to make them aware of the field of communication and their need for help in that field. Some associations turned to the land-grant colleges and universities for advice and training. But the NPAC home economics program was only just getting going when the seven years was up.

NPAC undertook a variety of other exploratory and contract services. It supported some pre-service training of agricultural journalists. It helped with regional radio clinics and the western regional, agricultural economics, writing short courses. It sponsored a National Agricultural Television Workshop and commissioned and published books that summarized research on such subjects as diffusion of information and readability. NPAC financed development of AGDEX—an agriculturally focused filing and coding system for both computer and paper-and-pencil coding—the forerunner of EMIS and SEMIS in extension. And the list goes on.

NPAC Changed Us

These efforts changed agricultural communication and the lives of many practitioners. Outcomes are visible still in ACE and the land-grant system.

While there have been no extensive empirical studies to document these outcomes, anecdotal evidence is strong.

1. NPAC made others more aware of the value and importance of communication.

Hal R. Taylor, long-time ACE member and former Director of USDA's Office of Information, puts it this way:

Most information people in the land-grant system owe their very jobs to NPAC...Early on NPAC got administrators interested and aware

that information activities were more than just the skills commonly attributed to editors, information specialists, artists, photographers, designers, etc.

Francis C. Byrnes, international communicator and ACE life member who served as Associate Director of NPAC says:

Perhaps most important was the way that training NPAC provided directly, or helped individuals gain access to, changed the knowledge, attitudes, and actual behavior of people working in the land-grant system

Richard L. Lee, former head of the University of Missouri agricultural communications staff and former ACE president, says:

I think NPAC, with Stan's leadership, made an immeasurable contribution to extension and agricultural leadership—and beyond agriculture, too. There was a generation who became better communicators as a result of the NPAC experience.

Byrnes continues:

Administrators and leaders, agricultural and home economics professors and specialists, and communication staffs learned that successful communication—whether in education, extension, training, management, or similar people-related activities—depends upon learning and takes into account the knowledge, understanding, attitudes, and socio-economic circumstances of those they seek to serve.

Byrnes believes:

Participants gained appreciation for and skills in communication, particularly in ways to listen to, observe the behavior of, and ask questions of those with whom they wished to communicate. The knowledge gained enabled them to be more skillful in preparing or selecting messages, in choosing channels of communication, and in assessing success or failure in terms of behavioral change rather than in statistics or numbers of people exposed to messages or number of messages transmitted.

2. NPAC brought groups and individuals together to work on common interests and problems—people who rarely worked together before.

NPAC, concentrating on being a catalyst, brought people in the land-grant system with communication concerns together, and helped them gain the skills, knowledge, and incentive to tackle those concerns.

NPAC staff prodded, demonstrated, supported, and helped think through problems and solutions. But mostly the final success of each effort depended on the will and desire of those with the problem. NPAC could stir things up, but left it up to the system to decide what went and what did not, and what the ultimate impact would be.

The CT, in particular, brought together relevant resources of the land-grant universities. Departmental and college lines were crossed and recrossed in the hiring of teaching staff and consultants, and in the presentations themselves. Considerable activity was generated within the land-grant system relative to combining its forces to attack some of its own problems and concerns—the various states joining together to finance a program for their common benefit, for example.

3. NPAC raised the status of information staffs.

Robert L. Crom, retired ECOP executive secretary and former Director of Agricultural Extension at Iowa State University, believes:

NPAC was a major factor in professional communicators being more widely recognized as necessary and earlier participants in the making of programmatic and administrative strategic decisions. The concept of 'consulting communicator' was central to the notion.

K. Robert Kern, retired Head of the Iowa State University Agricultural Communication staff and former ACE president, comments:

No doubt NPAC was a force in upgrading communicators. At the same time, it was a legitimizer of a broader role. It brought program leaders, subject specialists, and communications specialists into teamwork as trainees. Some of that team experience stuck when people went back to their own niches. When those trainees went home and trained others, influence was magnified. That did much to spur the acceptance of the idea that communication was a fundamental part of programs in land-grant colleges and USDA.

4. NPAC had a tremendous impact on many individual agricultural information workers.

NPAC opened a new world to the editors of the time: new ways of thinking about and approaching communication, new ways of thinking about learning and teaching. Many, including all those quoted in this article, enrolled in advanced degree programs. New opportunities opened for them in teaching, research, and administrative positions. A large number became interested in the international field and took advantage of opportunities to share their expertise with colleagues around the world.

Lee says this of his own experiences in NPAC programs:

It opened up new communications concepts, exposed me to communications research, and stimulated my thinking beyond the narrow scope of communications (journalism) as taught in many schools. NPAC training played a role in prompting me to work on a doctorate in Mass Communication and Society at the University of Iowa ... I know that the training I received, and the training that I provided others, helped tremendously in my professional development.

5. NPAC helped make ACE what it is today.

Today's vocabulary in ACE and in agricultural communication echoes language of NPAC days. Concepts such as train-the-trainer, social action, audience analysis, diffusion of information, and behavioral change were the currency of NPAC training programs and materials.

ACE committees were influenced as well. Programs sponsored by the AAACE research committee took on a new character. AAACE members began to be interested in research, even having general-session programs at national meetings. The research committee found itself with some unexpected strength and life. This has continued. Research today—while never as strong and supported as in the learned societies—has a regular, productive, and expected place in ACE meetings, discussions, and publications.

Another outcome was the establishment of several regional research committees with a communication focus. NCR 14 and 44 in the North Central Region were made up mostly of agricultural communication members, many of whom obtained advanced degrees with the research training and experience involved in such programs.

Interest in international communication culminated in two programs where U. S. agricultural communicators and their administrators of international agricultural programs met to examine the communications ramifications, needs, and methods of international programs. The strong International SIG partially owes its beginnings to NPAC and its involving ag editors in international programs.

After seeing the benefits to extension of its information workers and administrators tackling their communication problems together, experiment station editors and administrators also met twice in national conferences to consider research communication needs.

The NPAC training philosophies also went to the Philippines, Colombia, Mexico, and Nigeria as communication staffs at IRRI, CIAT, CIMMYT, and IITA implemented training and research programs in communication for their workers. Aspects of these programs now surface in the communication and training programs of the 18 institutions under the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR).

Byrnes recalls:

Many U.S. communication graduates, working as consultants to or as heads of training and communication in the international centers, not only introduced new communication concepts into center information activities but also adapted the approaches to training in the design

and conduct of technical training to prepare agricultural research staffs of national institutions in the developing countries.

The Final Outcome

NPAC existed under the Kellogg grants from 1953 to 1960. Hopes that the land-grant system would assume funding of the parts of the program it found most valuable were never realized.

Many of us were much changed by what NPAC did—in our skills, our knowledge, and our outlook on what communication is about. NPAC also stimulated personnel in the land-grant system to seek knowledge and understanding of communication and of the professional communicator's role, and helped demonstrate the benefits of crossing disciplinary lines and the synergy possible when people of disparate backgrounds are brought together to solve problems. The ACE of today reflects all of these changes—a strong emphasis on professional improvement, a viable research committee and program, a strong international SIG, and broader understanding of the communication process and all of its ramifications.

Taylor says, "Don Wells commented once about the need to have a sense of history. We all need to breathe our history always."

As Taylor points out, NPAC did not spring full-blown from those persons immediately responsible. It and ACE owe much to another set of communication giants of even earlier days.

So, as NPAC taught us, both communication and history are processes. What went before affects what follows. NPAC grew out of what AAACE had been and what its members needed. What NPAC was and did, in turn, helped make ACE, and agricultural communication in the land-grant system and abroad, what they are today.

Acknowledgement

Dr. Francis C. Byrnes and Dr. K. Robert Kern, both Life ACE members now working as private communication consultants, instigated my writing this article. They generously contributed items for this manuscript, and Frank served as my editor, for which I thank them. My thanks also to the retired editors and administrators who responded concerning what NPAC had meant to them and the land-grant system.

Stanley Andrews, 1894-1994

More than any one person, Stanley Andrews shaped the National Project in Agricultural Communications (NPAC). As director, he turned the American Association of Agricultural College Editors' (AAACE's) dream into reality. Rural sociologist George Beal says of Andrews:

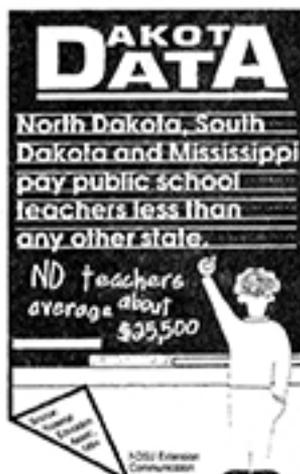
...it took someone from the action-administrative world to conceptualize and recognize the need, mobilize the interest groups and resources to plan and carry out NPAC. It wasn't the scholars and professionals. Stan not only had the vision of what needed to be done, but the clout to get the program under way.

A graduate of the University of Missouri, Andrews worked on various newspapers, owned KARK radio, and edited the *Arkansas Farmer* and the *American Cotton Grower*. He also was an executive with several USDA agencies.

During and after World War II, he served in the U.S. Army in various food, forestry, and fisheries administrative positions in Italy, in the U.S. Zone of Germany, in the U.S. and United Kingdom Zones of Western Germany, and as a civilian during the Berlin airlift.

After WWII, he became Director, Office of Foreign Agricultural Relations, USDA; and from 1951-1953 was Administrator, Technical Cooperation Administration, with the Point 4 Program. It was from that post that he became Director of NPAC.

AAACE awarded him its Reuben Brigham Award in 1959.



Graphic Design by Barry Brissman

Barry says about these nifty art pieces that his goal is "oddy, relevance, and drama." The idea first took root when the series appeared in North Dakota's weekly extension news packet in March 1994. Soon papers began printing Dakota Data, and journalists began using Dakota-Data statistics as a starting point for spinning stories of their own (see page 27).