

Appendix C

Reporting your evaluation results

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C.1 Introduction

Most of this guide has focused on the methodology required to do a good intervention effectiveness evaluation. This appendix focuses on what to do with the results of the evaluation. Written reports are the usual way to summarize them, even when an evaluation is done in-house. Not only does this provide a record for the organization, the process of writing the report also encourages a critical examination and synthesis of the evaluation activities and results. We will describe the sections that people typically include in a report. We will also discuss how your communication strategy should extend beyond the report itself.

C.2 Evaluation report

C.2.1 Structure of the report

Table C.1 lists what you would typically include in a report. First is the abstract/executive summary, which incorporates the main points of the introduction, methods, results, discussion and conclusion sections. This is typically one or two pages in length. This summary is an important since, for many readers, this might be the only section they read in its entirety.

- The introduction presents the goals of the intervention, the intervention itself and the general approach taken in the evaluation.
- Methods/procedures then describe the evaluation methods in detail.
- Results present the data gathered through the evaluation which address the evaluation

questions. This section should present the results not only in text, but also through figures, graphs and tables. These visual summaries facilitate uptake of the information for many readers.

- Many reports include a discussion section, which should lead the reader from the results to the conclusion. Whereas the results section gives a logical presentation of the results, the discussion synthesizes and interprets them with reference to current theory and understanding. The discussion section is also the place to consider threats to the internal

validity of the evaluation, including any reasoning based on theory or data from outside of the evaluation.

- The conclusions summarize what is concluded from the data and, possibly, any resulting recommendations. Conclusions should address the main evaluation questions.
- In fact, as much as possible, the entire report should be constructed so that the relationship of the various methods and results sub-sections to the evaluation questions and conclusions is clear.

Table C.1 What to include in the evaluation report ¹¹

Sections of report	Content of sections
Abstract/executive summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview of the program and evaluation • General results, conclusions and recommendations
Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purpose of the evaluation • Program and participant description (including staff, materials, activities, procedures, etc.) • Goals and objectives • Evaluation questions
Methods/procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design of the evaluation • Target population • Instruments (e.g., questionnaire) • Sampling procedures • Data collection procedures • Validity and reliability • Limitations • Data analyses procedures
Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of findings from data analyses • Answers to evaluation questions • Charts and graphs of findings
Discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explanation of findings • Interpretation of results • Consideration of threats to internal validity
Conclusions/recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conclusions about program effectiveness • Program recommendations

¹¹ Table from McKenzie and Smeltzer, *Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating Health Promotion Programs: A Primer*, 2nd ed. Copyright (c) 1997 by Allyn & Bacon. Adapted by permission.

C.2.2 Audience specificity

One of the key principles in communicating a report is to tailor it to the audience. It should have the audience's level of education and interests in mind. Key messages should be formulated in the conclusion and abstract so that they answer the questions most pertinent to the audience. Conceivably you might have more than one report - preparing both technical and lay person versions is common.

C.2.3 Clear language

The report should be written in clear language if a non-technical audience is planned. This means it will be quite different from the style found in many academic publications. Guidelines for clear language have been developed by many organizations¹². The following is a compilation from some of these .

Guidelines for writing in clear language

Overall

- Write with your audience's needs, knowledge and abilities in mind

Document organization

- Include a table of contents for longer documents
- Divide document into sections of related information, using headings and sub-headings
- Include detailed or technical material in an Appendix

Paragraphs

- Limit each paragraph to one idea
- Avoid paragraphs of more than five sentences
- Consider using point form for a list of related items
- Use left justification, but not right justification; i.e., leave a ragged right margin

Sentences

- Limit each sentence to one point
- Sentences should be no more than 20 words on average and, typically, not exceed 25 to 30 words
- Use a subject-verb-object order for most sentences

Words

- Avoid jargon and technical words; explain them when used
- Eliminate unnecessary words (e.g., replace "in view of the fact" with "because")
- Use the active voice instead of the passive voice. (e.g., replace "The requirement of the workplace was that employees...." with "The workplace required employees....")
- Avoid chains of nouns (e.g., resource allocation procedures)

Font

- Use a serif style of font (with hooks on the end of characters) instead of a sans serif style
- Do not use all upper case (i.e., all capital) letters for anything longer than a brief statement
- 12 point type is recommended for the main text

¹² For example: Baldwin R [1990]. Clear writing and literacy. Toronto: ON Literacy Coalition; Canadian Labour Congress [1999]. Making it clear: Clear language for union communications. Ottawa: Canadian Labour Congress; Gowers E (revised by Greenbaum S, Whitcut J) [1986]. The complete plain words. London: HMSO; Ministry of Multiculturalism and Citizenship [1991]. Plain language clear and simple. Ottawa: Ministry of Supply and Services.

C.3 Communication beyond the report

Communicating the evaluation results involves more than producing the evaluation report. Relationships between would-be users of the evaluation results and the evaluators should be established early on, because the successful uptake of results often depends on a few key individuals who understand and support the evaluation. For this reason we recommend forming an evaluation committee at the outset that includes key stakeholders (Chapter 2). This committee should be involved at all stages of the evaluation: development of questions; selection of design and methodology; and interpretation of results. An ongoing engagement of stakeholders fosters trust, understanding and ownership of the results. It also helps ensure that the results are appropriate to their needs.

At the point of release of the final results, you will ideally include several interactive means of presenting the report's results, involving either larger verbal presentations or small group meetings. Interaction of the audience with the presenters should be encouraged in both cases. Make sure the key messages of the report are emphasized and give people the opportunity to voice any doubts or lack of understanding. A variety of written, verbal and visual presentations might be needed for various audiences.

C.4 Summary

Communication of the evaluation results involves, at the very least, a clear, well-organized, audience-specific evaluation report. Other strategies, including the ongoing engagement of an appropriately structured evaluation committee can further the use of an evaluation's results.