

# Basics of Evaluation Reporting or Dissemination



Extension  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON



Successful evaluation reporting and dissemination communicates results by considering who will be impacted by the evaluation results.



Successful evaluation reporting considers how the results will be used.

Reporting and disseminating are the means by which evaluators share the results of an evaluation with program partners, leadership, participants, and other stakeholders. Consider the following information when reporting or disseminating your evaluation results.

## 1 Before you begin your evaluation, consider the needs of and get input from your evaluation stakeholders.

The central evaluation questions and evaluation purpose (i.e., what are you trying to learn and why?) should drive both the way that information is collected and how it is shared.

### Who cares about the evaluation results or are impacted by the results?

There is usually a need to prioritize who the evaluation is for.

- Is it for program staff to learn about the program for program improvement purposes?
- Is it for the program participants, to be accountable and responsive to participants? Consider involving participants in designing the evaluation or in having roles beyond providing data—(See *Further reading*, page 4, University of Kansas; Global Family Research Project, 2019).
- Do you want or need to be able to show the program's value to a specific organization or funder?

### What do these people say is important to them regarding the evaluation?

What do you and they want to learn from the evaluation?

- Many funders, stakeholders and other interested parties tell you what they want to know. Some you need to ask. Others need to be told what findings are important.

**Rubrics are one way to define up front what a successful evaluation looks like to you so that later you know what will be the most important to highlight in your report.**



EVALUATION  
*Quick Tips*

For additional Quick Tips in this series visit  
[fyi.extension.wisc.edu/programdevelopment](https://fyi.extension.wisc.edu/programdevelopment).



*“Evaluative rubrics make transparent how quality and value are defined and applied. I sometimes refer to rubrics as the antidote to both ‘Rorschach inkblot’ (“You work it out”) and ‘divine judgment’ (“I looked upon it and saw that it was good”)-type evaluations.”*

—JANE DAVIDSON

## 2 How can the results most effectively be shared and utilized?

**Be creative about how to share evaluation results. For example:**

- Involve users in the evaluation so that the buy-in is natural and that you’re not relying on them to read a final report later. Involvement could vary from helping design the evaluation to collecting or analyzing data. Data jams create spaces to work together on data analysis projects. (See **Further reading**, page 4).
- Most readers/users of evaluation care most about the key takeaway results and next steps. As such, consider using “flipped evaluation reports” where results are presented first and methods follow (opposite of traditional scientific papers).
- If the purpose is program improvement, perhaps spend less time on a polished report and more time scheduling and facilitating meetings with those who lead and implement the program. Discussing the results and brainstorming

proposed changes will likely be more impactful than emailing a report out and hoping that someone acts on it.

- If you are reporting to a funder and they do not have a template they want you to follow, consider creating 1-2 page highlight documents to ensure that busy leaders, legislators, etc., will at least see the main points. This can be a supplement to a longer report so that the detailed data and methods are still available for reference or when there are questions. Sometimes starting with a shorter report and seeing what questions the evaluation users still have can drive your next steps, rather than making assumptions about what people want to see. That said, it is your duty as an evaluator to act with honesty and transparency, and to share results that may be uncomfortable, e.g., areas for program improvement, truths about who the program is not working well for and why, who the program is and is not reaching, etc. (American Evaluation Association, 2018).

## 3 Describe methods and results appropriately so that the user understands what was done, what was found, and can come to their own conclusions about the credibility of your evaluation.

Knowing your audience (#1 on page 1) will help you decide how much detail to go into regarding methods or any reporting of statistical results.

### Methods

Give your audience important details of the evaluation.

- **What & Why**—Your central evaluation question(s) and purpose for the evaluation, and how these were determined.
  - » Give some brief context on the program itself for readers who may not be familiar with the program that was evaluated.
- **Who**—Your source(s) of information, including sample size and response rate. Include demographics of evaluation participants. If your evaluation is with program participants, what do you know of who participated in the program versus who responded to the evaluation?
- **How, Where & When**—Your data collection methods, the locations from which you collected data, and the time frame you collected the data.

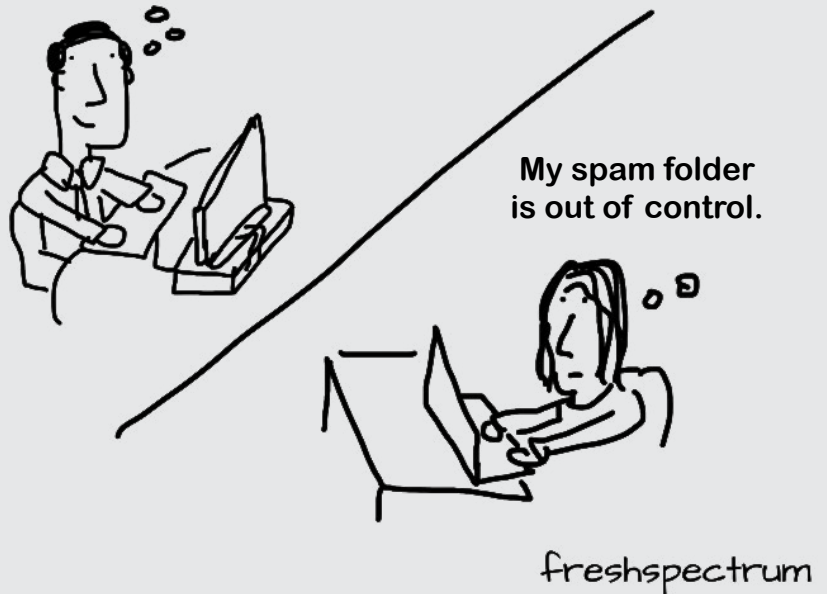
## Results

- Identify which points are critical to make.
- Use visuals to draw users to these points. Search for “data visualization” online to learn more.
- Even though you have a “methods” section, it’s important to be clear in the “results” section about the way questions were asked. Since the reader/user is likely not reviewing the data collection tools or protocols while reviewing results, it is your responsibility to represent the results appropriately. Using language directly from the survey or interview can help a reader—e.g., “\_\_\_% of farmers who participated in the evaluation said that as a result of the program, they planted cover crops this year as opposed to leaving their fields empty.”
- Be precise when you use the word “significant”. With some audiences, “significant” could imply that you used hypothesis testing and statistics.

### 4 What else should be included?

- Clear takeaways, recommendations, and/or next steps: Just like a scientific study does not end with *Results* but goes on to *Discussion*, an evaluation should not end with simply stating the results.
- The evaluation’s limitations and assumptions—e.g., address how the evaluation could have been improved.

Nice. Email sent.  
Dissemination complete.



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### 5 Ask, adapt, and iterate. Evaluate the evaluation reporting and dissemination.

Consider applying pilot testing principles to evaluation reporting—there are strengths in asking both people who are familiar and unfamiliar with the project. Is it easy to understand? What do you take away? How can this be improved? In what other formats and venues should I communicate this information?

For those familiar with the project—Can these results be acted upon? Did you answer the big picture question(s) you set out to answer?

Then, improve your dissemination by making changes that reflect their feedback.

### Tips

- Include the date (month and year) on reports and presentations.
- Credit partners; work with them to appropriately represent their contributions.

## Further reading

American Evaluation Association. 2018. "American Evaluation Association Guiding Principles for Evaluators." <https://www.eval.org/About/Guiding-Principles>.

Center for Disease Control and Prevention. 2013. "Evaluation Reporting: A Guide to Help Ensure Use of Evaluation Findings." US Dept. of Health and Human Services. [https://www.cdc.gov/dhdsp/docs/evaluation\\_reporting\\_guide.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/dhdsp/docs/evaluation_reporting_guide.pdf).

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Global Family Research Project. 2019. "Participatory Evaluation." Medium. May 28, 2019. <https://medium.com/familyengagementplaybook/gfrp-participatory-evaluation-5b2b1721ab33>.

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Preskill, Hallie, Lynn, Jewlya. 2017. "Rethinking Rigor." FSG. May 3, 2017. <https://www.fsg.org/tools-and-resources/rethinking-rigor>.

University of Kansas. "Section 6. Participatory Evaluation." *The Community Tool Box*. <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/evaluate/evaluation/participatory-evaluation/main>.

University of Wisconsin–Madison Division of Extension. *The Data Jam Toolkit*. <https://fyi.extension.wisc.edu/datajams>.



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