

EXCITE Seminar: Impact Writing

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What is impact?

Basically, impact is the reportable, quantifiable difference or potential difference your program makes in people's lives.

Impact is important

- Growing demand for impact info
- Return on investments/payoffs
- Continued funding/support
- Demonstrates value & benefits

Audiences

- Lawmakers, public officials, decision-makers
- Agencies, partners, funders
- Taxpayers -- our stakeholders
- Agencies, organizations, industry
- Constituent & support groups
- Media

Audience similarities

- Want to know what we've done for them lately
- Are interested in results
- Want quantifiable benefits
- Want brief, understandable info
- Competition for their attention
- Some control over programs
- Are not specialists/scientists

How impacts are used

- Powerful communications tools
- Illustrate public payoffs/benefits
- Communicate with policy-makers, partners, funders, public
- Boost visibility/accountability
- Quick response to info requests
- Reports, speeches, newsletters
- Communications/marketing
- Locally to promote your efforts

An impact statement is

a brief summary, in lay terms, of economic, environmental, and/or social change and outcomes.

Impact statements always ...

Answer the key questions:

- So what?
- Who cares and why?

Impact statements

- Explain accomplishments and payoffs to society in ways non-scientists can understand, relate to and appreciate.
- Report the quantifiable difference or potential difference for the public.
- Illustrate change or potential change in one or more areas:
 - Economic value/efficiency
 - Environmental quality
 - Social well-being
 - Health and well-being

Report impact

In terms of:

- Knowledge gained, how used
- Behavior, attitude changes
- Practice, situation changes
- Economic, social, environmental change

Effective impacts

- Provide only enough detail for context
- Highlight public benefits, outcomes, payoffs
- Some of the best are short

Impact is not

- An activities report
- Numbers served, involved, etc.
- Description of process
- Technical/scientific report
- A long, detailed account
- For administrators or peers

Quantifying can be tough

- Some aren't 'bushels or bucks'
- Youth & family; prevention
- Long-term projects
- Classroom teaching
- Basic research

Tips for toughies

- Focus on potential impact
- Explain issue's importance
- Report accomplishments to date ...extrapolate carefully
- Anecdotes, testimonials

Anecdotes/Testimonials

- Single, quantifiable examples of behavior or other change
- Put a human face on the project
- Complement facts and figures
- Can be powerful

Before you write

- Ask yourself specific questions
- Identify, gather key information

Specifically ... ask

- Did this increase knowledge? What? Whose?
- How is knowledge being used?
- Behaviors, situation changes?
- Was it economic, environmental or social, or a combination?
- Do I have data to quantify changes?
- What's missing?

Identify

- What type of impact
- Who benefits & how
- Key facts, figures, examples
- Info to put impact in context
- What's vital for audience

When you write

- Remember your audience
- Trade details for understanding
- Avoid jargon, technical terms
- Use everyday language
- Cover process briefly
- Write for 10th grade level
- Focus on practical outcomes
- Think '30-second version'

Possible impact outline — Three key elements

- Issue (Who cares and why?)
- What's been done
- Impact (So what?)

Issue (Who cares and why?)

- Brief problem/issue statement
- Sets stage, frames situation
- May mention potential payoffs

What has been done?

- Brief overview of process
- Briefly reports numbers of participants, acres, events, etc.
- Provides context, few details

Impact (So what?)

- Take-home message
- Facts, figures quantify change
- Reports scope of outcome/ benefit
 - May include testimonials, anecdotes

Putting impact to work

Impact statements aren't just for administration. Once you quantify public benefits, use it for:

- Putting impact to work
- IANR accountability databases
- Progress, accomplishment, unit reports
- Info for partners, funders
- To promote your programs

The bottom line ...

- Impact helps tell IANR's story
- Funding/support depend on how well we explain the benefits of our work in ways the public understands and values

Impact Writing Tip

With words, less is more

- It's the right words, not the most.
- Simple, familiar words are best.
- Weed out extra words, confusing terms and jargon.
- Keep sentences short & simple.

Read what you write

- Edit as though you've never heard about this before.
- Find ways to simplify ... say the same thing with fewer words.
- Give readers the bottom line.
- Have someone else read it.