Tips for Writing Evaluation Reports

Evaluation reports are a useful way to describe program successes, as well as areas in need of improvement. When data is communicated well, it can be used to maintain current support, garner new backing, and apply for additional funding. The information in the report should be clear and understandable to those not directly involved in program implementation. The following is a suggested outline for organizing and presenting evaluation findings.

Front Cover - Make sure that your cover looks neat and professional—this is the first thing readers will see. The cover should include: title and location of your program or initiative; name(s) of evaluator(s); period covered by the report; and date of the report.

Executive Summary - Outline major findings and recommendations in a brief (two- to three-page) overview. Since many people only read the executive summary (and ignore the rest of the report,) be sure it is as clear and complete as possible. Describe:

- What was evaluated

- Why the evaluation was conducted

- Major findings and recommendations

- The report's intended audience and others who might find the report of interest

- Decisions that have been, or need to be made, based on the evaluation results

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Background Information About the Program – Assume readers know nothing about your program. With that in mind, include:

- Origins of your program or initiative

- Program goals

- Target audience

- Administrative/organizational structure

- Program activities and services

- Materials used and produced by the program

- Program staff

Description of the Evaluation - Explain why you conducted the evaluation and what you hoped to learn from it. Also explain anything the evaluation was not intended to do (e.g., if it was a process evaluation, it was not meant to assess program effectiveness.) Include:

- Name of organization requesting the evaluation

- Any evaluation restrictions (e.g., money, time)

- Evaluation design and why it was selected

- Timetable for collecting data

- Type of data collected (for each separate measure)

- Methods used to gather data and why they were chosen

- Steps taken to ensure accuracy

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Evaluation Results - Present your findings. To be complete, include:

- All of the data collected during the evaluation, analyzed, recorded, and organized so that it is easily understood (make sure to use charts, tables, and graphs, as appropriate)

- Excerpts from interviews

- Testimonials from participants and clients

- Questionnaire results

- Test scores

- Anecdotal evidence

Discussion of Results - Assign meaning to your results and place them in the context of your overall initiative. These are some questions this section might answer:

- How are you sure that your program or initiative caused these results?

- Were there any other factors that could have contributed to the results?

- If your program did not exist, how would the results differ?

- Based on these results, what are the strengths and weaknesses of your program?

Costs and Benefits –Justify your program's budget and financial choices (optional.) It may include:

- Costs associated with the initiative (e.g., resources, staff/volunteer hours)

- Methods used to develop the budget

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- Program benefits (both financial and non-financial)

Conclusions – Make your recommendations. After writing this entire report, you may be tempted to dash off a brief conclusion. Resist the temptation! Take your time and think through what you say. Include:

- Major conclusions based on the evaluation results

- Recommendations for future program activities

- Things about the evaluation that did and did not work well

- Recommendations for future program assessments

Adapted from Hampton, C. (2002). Communicating Information to Funders for Support and Accountability. University of Kansas: