Analyzing and Communicating Outcomes

Once you collect information on outcomes, it is important to think carefully about what the information means and how you will communicate it to stakeholders.

What Does Analysis Involve?

Analysis is the process of bringing order to the information you have gathered by comparing pre and post data to identify changes. It involves interpreting the information that you gathered by looking for relationships, explaining patterns, and looking for significance. It is a good idea to involve participants and other staff in the analysis process.

The challenge is to gather useful information, talk about it, reflect on it and weave the piece of information together to help you make sense of the outcomes. Remember that, as you work with the information, you should be guided by the information itself – what participants told you and what you observed, not what you think. (Tool 14)

Quantitative Analysis

One of the most common analysis approaches is quantitative or statistical analysis. Statistical analysis can very complex or very simple. For the purposes of reporting outcomes, SMART focuses on simple quantitative analysis. Two simple types of quantitative analysis are:

Percentage: the number of specific responses to a particular question divided by the number of respondents multiplied by 100.

Example:

80% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the skills they learned in training help them to be better peer supported.

Mean: the sum of all responses divided by the number of respondents.

Example:

On a scale of 1 – 4 where 1 is very low and 4 is very high, the average response for respondents was 3.4.

Quantitative analysis becomes even more useful when particular populations are disaggregated and examined in relationship to the general population.

Example:

Although 80% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the skills they learned in training help them to be better peer supported, only 40% of respondents who responded in a similar way.

Example:

Although the average response for all respondents was 3.4, the average response for people who self identify as LGBT was 2.8.

Qualitative Analysis

Many people do not yet fully understand or use the power of qualitative analysis. Like quantitative analysis, there are many complex ways of doing it; for SMART purposes, we will focus on some simple way, hopefully ways that are useful to your organizations. Some techniques include:

Categorization and Coding Techniques: This involves reading through the responses and identifying categories of responses. Then the data is read through a second time and assigned to a specific category. This can be done by actually cutting and pasting or by color coding using felt pens. These categories can then by quantified and described.

Examples:

65% of respondents indicated that they are able to apply new skills as a result of participating in the program. Some examples of participants applying their skills include:

- *I had a conflict with another volunteer and we talked it out*
- *When my little boy does something he shouldn't, I can explain it to him rather then yell at him*

Contextualizing Analysis Techniques: This involves a review of data to highlight circumstances that might affect one person/group more than others. This brings to light important individual differences that might be lost with coding techniques.

Example:

The following response "I couldn't really pay attention because I was worried about whether I would lose my housing at the end of the month" does not help with assessing outcomes but gives useful information for programming purposes.

Memo-Writing Techniques: Because all analysis is subject to bias, it is important to identify the bias and give it voice. You can do this by writing little memos on sticky paper at any point in the data where you experience a possible bias. Then collaborative analysis with team members allows the collective bias to be understood and the implications for monitoring and program development explored.

Example:

The respondent indicates that "I couldn't make it to all the sessions because I was sick." The person reviewing the data thinks "you weren't sick, you were using" …while this may be the case, it is important to highlight and discuss with colleagues in terms of the value judgment associated with it and implications for the program.

When to Analyze

So that you can best use this information for management purposes, it is a good idea to start analyzing early on. As you gather information, look at it carefully and ask yourselves:

- What does this information say so far?
- Are we getting as much information as we want and need?
- What information is missing?
- What does this mean for how the program was designed?
- What does this mean for how the program is managed?

Tool 15 describes the steps of collaborative analysis.

Writing an Outcome Statement

Draft a concise and rich outcome statement can be tricky. The key is to provide only the information that briefly but clearly describes the change that occurred. An outcome statement should:

- provide the information the indicator is asking for
- interpret that information in terms of the planned outcome
- refer to method used to get the information.

Example:

65% of workshop participants indicate on a participant survey that they understand and are able to apply appropriate communication skills. Some examples of participants applying their skills include:

- *I had a conflict with another volunteer and we talked it out*
- *When my little boy does something he shouldn't, I can explain it to him rather then yell at him*

Developing a Communication Plan

It is a good idea to develop a communication plan that sets out how you will share the results of your hard work. This plan could describe:

- the frequency and type of communication with the board, staff and funder
- specifications for interim reports and press releases, and
- protocols for preparing and disseminating press releases.

Tool 16 walks you through the process of developing a communication plan

Preparing the Report

When deciding how to write the report, consider the following:

- who your audience is, as different audiences need different information.
- the most appropriate format including: level of detail required, readability, graphics needed, formality of language, and flow of ideas.
- the content using your outcome measurement framework as a guide, emphasizing the outcomes achieved as well as unintended outcomes; and
- how you will describe the analysis and suggestions for action. (Tool 17)

Communicating Results

The timing of communications is important. Most communication material should be reviewed with the board, staff and the funder before it is released into the public domain. There are some situations where the timing for the release of a report may unfairly impact on other decisions. Discretion should be used in these cases. An example: Your board needs to make decisions on program cuts. One board member is not supportive of a particular program. A mediocre monitoring report may give this board member unfair advantage for a decision to cut that program.

Some ways to communicate your results so that the community is aware of the change you are making include:

- announcements to draw attention to the release of the report
- cover letters to communicate the availability of the report to colleagues and community groups
- presentations to funders, partners and other community stakeholders which provide an opportunity to discuss the findings in depth
- a press release to stimulate the interest of the press when findings are noteworthy
- community workshops to provide a venue to discuss findings and explore new actions
- community newsletters and brochures to get the message out to a large audience
- community information meetings to share or discuss findings and conclusions
- health fairs and other community events.

Using Results as the Basis for Further Action

The report can be used to draw attention to issues and promote specific strategies based on the findings. When an organization communicates how it will energetically address monitoring recommendations, and then follows through on these commitments, it builds confidence in its management approaches. Work with your staff to review the program and develop a list of actions to respond to the findings. Report back to your board and funder on how the findings are acted upon.

Tool 14

Tools for Collaborative Analysis

Purpose
To help your group obtain the most relevant project management and reporting information from your data collection efforts.

Description
This tool presents a three-step process to handle the data you have collected. It looks at sorting, compiling, and analyzing your data so that you can use it to improve your project management and reporting.

When to Use
When you have gathered data according to your data collection plan.

How to Use
In Step 1, review the questions about sorting your data. You will want to carefully consider what information is essential for you to know. Answer the questions provided to help plan how you will sort the data.

In Step 2, review the information about compiling data. Decide what is the most cost-effective and labour-effective way to handle your data. Discuss with your group the most effective way to distill the data you've gathered into useful information.

In Step 3, review the information and ideas about analyzing data. Develop your findings, and work through recommendations with your group. Based on your analysis, make any necessary changes to the project. Keep your key stakeholders, including your funder, aware of any changes your are making, and why you are making them.

After you've gone through the process once, review your data collection plan, and make any necessary changes.

Step 1: Sorting Your Data
Review the information below regarding the data you have collected. First and most important rule: If you are not going to use the data, don't gather it!

1. In order to use your resources effectively, decide with your project team which data is:
   - essential to know
   - nice to know
   - not important to know

   Is it possible that you may have gathered more data than you need? This is a good learning experience, and helps with the planning for the next time.

2. Are there groups within your data sources that should be looked at separately, so that you're not comparing apples to oranges?

   For example:
   - meeting minutes where the chairperson was not present and those where he or she was present
   - rural audiences and urban audiences
   - women and men

Sort your primary data (records or response sheets) into categories.

3. Decide how much data you need for a reliable picture of progress toward your outcomes.

   Do you need to take a sampling of the primary data so that you're not overwhelmed with the next stages? Would drawing every 10th record or response sheet at random from the pile give you enough data to accurately know what's happening in your project?

Step 2: Compiling Your Data

Compiling means putting together similar pieces of data so that they can be compared.

> For example:
>
> - If there are several questions on a feedback form, you may want to compile all of the answers to each specific question separately, in order to get a sense of the overall response.
> - If, however, you want to see to what degree participants have gained new knowledge and skills from a session, you may want to aggregate each person's scores on the feedback form, rather than compiling the data by question.

1. Review your data, and decide what similar pieces will need to be compared. The less you have to re-record data, the better. Is there a way you can collect the pieces without re-recording them?
2. Depending on how much data you have, you may also have to develop categories, so that tallies can be made of the responses. This turns qualitative data(information about feelings, perceptions, motivations) into quantitative data(information about things that can be counted). What categories will you use to compile your data?
3. How will you store similar pieces of data?

One low-tech way to compile data is to photocopy all your response sheets (keep the originals as part of your project records), and cut up the sheets so that each separate question and answer are together.

A simple database can also be set up to compile and store data. This takes some preparation, but will make it easier to manage large quantities of data.

Step 3: Analyzing Your Data

This is the exciting part, where your project team looks at the information gathered, and makes decisions based on what is happening.

1. At this stage, gather your team together to debate and critically analyze why you are doing what you are doing, and whether or not you are generating the outcomes you want.

This can be very effective for re-connecting the members of your project team and stakeholders to their desired outcomes, and re-affirming common direction. It is also a concrete demonstration of how much the opinions and experience of each member of the project team are valued — don't let this opportunity pass!

2. With your team, look at what the information says, and determine your findings.

For example:

Responses to your question, “What is the most important thing I learned?” might be:

- 70% of respondents felt that “incidents of racism need to be challenged”
- 20% of respondents felt that they “learned some effective strategies to challenge racist incidents”
- 10% of respondents felt that “racism is bad”

One low-tech way to compile data is to photocopy all your response sheets (keep the originals as part of your project records), and cut up the sheets so that each separate question and answer are together.

Therefore, your finding is that the majority of respondents learned that “incidents of racism need to be challenged,” although some learned “effective strategies to challenge racism,” and some became aware that “racism is bad.”

3. With your team, decide what the information means, and develop conclusions and recommendations.

Using the example above, your conclusions about this depend entirely on the initial intent of your activity:

- If your education session was aimed at raising awareness, then it was successful – 80% of your participants came away more aware that racism should be challenged.
- However, if your education session was aimed at giving participants strategies to challenge racist incidents, and only 20% of them responded that they learned some new strategies, then the session was not very successful.

Your recommendations for future programming depend on why your project team thinks the results occurred:

- Was it because the session was too advanced for your audience? If so, how would you ensure that this doesn’t happen again?
- Was it because the session spent too much time on awareness raising, which most people didn’t need, and too little time on strategies? How does the session need to be changed accordingly?
- What else might the findings mean? Deciding on the particular meaning of the data is very tricky — it may mean one thing to one person, and another thing to someone else. It is important to get as many viewpoints as possible to be sure of an accurate interpretation as a basis for recommendations, reporting, and planning.

Considerations

As much as your budget and time will allow, try to ensure that team members and representatives from your stakeholder groups have the opportunity to participate in a data analysis session at least once per project cycle.

Start the meeting with the least expected findings, so that your group has time to carefully examine all the factors behind those findings, and collectively learn from them.

Some of the data may be quite dry and fairly expected. Don’t spend your meeting time on this. Schedule it for the end of the meeting, report it, and move on — though always be prepared for the odd surprise.

Tool 15

Communicating About Outcomes Achieved

Purpose

To help your group communicate to a wide range of audiences the changes the project has made and the learning and experience gained.

Description

This tool provides some guidelines for the development of a communication plan and ongoing action on recommendations.

When to Use

When you are have completed your report to the funder and are ready to communicate to other stakeholder groups and build support for the changes you are seeking in the community.

How to Use

There may well be many different people in your organization who should play a role in communicating the outcomes achieved. They may include your board chair, the executive director, staff, volunteers, and/or program participants. Bring these people together to collaboratively develop an action plan.

Step 1: Creating a Communication Plan

The communication plan should include:

Recipients of the Final Report

Brainstorm ideas of who would find the information in the evaluation useful. Your list could include other funders, community partners, political representatives, program participants and community residents.

Timing

The timing of the report is important. The report should be reviewed with the board, staff and the funder before it is released into the public domain. There are some situations where the timing for the release of a report may unfairly impact on other decisions. Discretion should be used in these cases. (examples?)

Announcement Strategy

In some cases, it is useful to draw attention to the release of the report through a cover letter, a presentation or a press release. Cover letters are excellent ways to communicate the availability of the report to colleagues and community organizations. Presentations help funders, partners, and community stakeholders understand the findings and provide opportunities for them to query the findings and recommendations. A press release is a good way to stimulate the interest of the press if the findings are newsworthy. Another idea is to hold a community workshop to present the findings and consider new directions. For a general audience, popularized articles for community newsletters can help community members understand the relevance of the findings to their community.

Communication Format

Some recipients will require a copy of the full report. Decide whether hard copies or electronic copies will be distributed, if it will be posted to your website, where it can easily be downloaded.

Who Will Speak

Depending on the message, you will want to choose different voices. If the message is a controversial message, you might consider having the board chair or executive director be the spokesperson. If you want to highlight the important contributions of staff or volunteers, their voice should be front and centre. Changes in the community are most compelling if described in the words of the program participants.

Step 2: Responding to Recommendations

The report can be used for several years after the evaluation is completed to draw attention to issues and promote specific strategies based on the findings. When an organization communicates how it will energetically address the evaluation recommendations, then follows through on these commitments, it builds confidence in its management approaches. Work with your staff to review the program and develop a list of actions to respond to the recommendations. Report back to your board and funder on how the recommendations are acted upon.

Tool 16

Reporting Your Outcomes

Purpose
To help your group document the changes the project has made, as well as the learning and experience gained, for yourselves, your funders, your participants, and other stakeholders.

Description
This tool sets out questions to help your group focus on what the audience of your report needs to know. It gives suggestions for content and format of your report, including an Outcomes Reporting template. An example of an outcomes-based report is included in the tool.

When to Use
When you are ready to report on your outcomes. You will probably be reporting at regular intervals throughout the project, as well as at the mid-term and end of the project.

How to Use
In Step 1, determine with your group the audience of the report.

In Step 2, decide on the most appropriate format for your audience.

In Step 3, clarify your content, focusing on what has changed as a result of your project.

Step 1: Defining Your Intended Audience
The first step for any report is to clarify the primary audience of the report.

Is your report primarily intended for:

- stakeholders
- project partners
- board of directors
- funders

Step 2: Deciding on the Most Appropriate Format
What are the formal reporting requirements (if any) of each of the above groups? Are there report formats or guidelines in place? The same reporting format will not work for all audiences. Consider what group you are reporting to, and what is the most effective way of communicating with them. You will need to consider such things as:

- level of detail required Is this an interim or final report, or one in a series of reports on this project? Is the report for an internal audience with some knowledge about the project and situation, or to an external audience with none?
- amount of time available for reading the report
- comfort with types of language
- (e.g., academic language, technical terms, acronyms, simple English)
- appropriate tone (e.g., formal, informal)

For example, while you might need to submit a formal progress report or annual report to your funder, this may not communicate very well to project stakeholders or participants. Consider including a brief Executive Summary that summarizes findings, and ensure that your outline is very clear so that people can choose to read the sections that are most relevant to them.

- clients
- members
- volunteers
- all or some combination of the above groups

Consider other ideas for creatively reporting your project progress and outcomes, depending on your audience:

- project bullet in
- video
- stories or testimonials
- oral presentation
- computer slide show presentation

Step 3: Determining Your Content

While you may be used to reporting on activities, (e.g., We conducted 5 public awareness sessions this quarter), you will want to place more emphasis on your outcomes. In other words:

- What difference did your activities make?
- What did you learn?
- What would you do differently next time, or advise others to do differently if they were attempting the same project?
- What was expected; what was unexpected?

Suggested Outcomes Reporting Format

1. Activities:
   Describe the activities you conducted in this reporting period.

2. Outputs:
   Include your output data here.
   For example: Designed and delivered anti-racism workshops
   For example: 5 one-day workshops conducted, with a total of 80 participants attending

3. Expected Outcomes:
   Insert your expected outcomes from your Outcome Measurement framework here.

   You are likely to have more expected outcomes than this; however, for the purposes of this example, we have deliberately kept it simple.

4. Indicators, Sample Size, and Methods:
   Include the indicators you used, as well as the sample size and method used to gather your data.

5. Findings:

   Insert your findings here.

   For example: Indicator used: level of audience satisfaction regarding content, resource persons and materials, style of delivery, facilities.

   Sample size: 25% of workshop participants completed surveys.

   Method used: questionnaire

   For example: The audience's expectations of content and format are met.

   For example: Overall,

   - 70% of respondents were highly satisfied with the workshop.
   - 20% of respondents were somewhat satisfied with the workshop.
   - 10% were somewhat dissatisfied with the workshop.

   In general, participants were satisfied with the enthusiasm and knowledge of the facilitators, and the way the subject matter was presented. Specific dissatisfaction arose from the fact that participation was not voluntary; participants were required by their supervisors to attend.

6. Analysis:

   Provide the analysis of your findings here. Are the results positive or negative?

   Has this project moved you closer to your desired intermediate and long-term outcomes? What could you have done differently?

For example: The workshop participants were drawn from various departments by their supervisors. Participation was not voluntary, and a lot of resistance was expressed during the initial exercise of the workshop to explore expectations. Considering this, the satisfaction rate is very high.

However, if we had debriefed the participants after the morning and afternoon sessions, it may have allowed 'resistors' to move beyond their resentment of their forced participation into a discussion of what they were learning, and how and whether it might be useful to them. The high satisfaction rates may make participants more willing to pursue further training in this area.

You might also include a discussion of what helped or hindered your project during this period, and any insights you have about effective practices that should be considered in the planning of your next project.

For example: It would have been helpful if the workshop facilitators had known about the methods used to encourage participation, and the fact that attendance was mandatory. For any future anti-racism workshops in the workplace, the workshop design must take into account how much resistance is likely to exist among participants, and what specific techniques will be used to draw that out and deal with it positively.

We expected more participants for the workshops – at least 15 at each one, for a total of 75. A snowstorm on the day of workshop #2 (coupled with the involuntary registration) meant that only 10 of our anticipated 20 participants arrived. In addition, there was a fire on the floor in the packing plant two days before workshop #3, and 18 participants from that department were unable to attend the subsequent workshops.

7. Unintended Outcomes:
   What happened during the course of the project that you didn't anticipate – either positive or negative?

For example: It was understood by the facilitators that supervisors had already received anti-racism training, and were comfortable with their knowledge and skills in this area. After reviewing the feedback from their staff who participated in the workshop, three of the five supervisors asked if the facilitators could design a training program for them. They requested that the basics be covered in this workshop, as well as strategies for intervening within teams when issues arise. These supervisors have discussed this with their department heads, and have found money in the budget. They are discussing the design with all the supervisors at their level for three one-day workshops to be held over the next six months.

Two of the participants in the workshop have raised team issues with their supervisors, and facilitators have consulted on ways to constructively address these issues with the team. These issues may be used as case studies in the supervisor workshops.

7. Conclusion:
   Briefly summarize your report here.

For example: Participants in these training sessions were, for the most part, satisfied with the training. Lessons were learned about how to plan for and overcome resistance, and about clarifying, in advance of sessions, how trainees will be recruited to attend.

As a result of this training, further sessions are being developed to work with employees at the supervisory level, and two teams are in the process of addressing issues that were highlighted in the anti-racism training sessions that had previously been disregarded.

Outcomes Reporting Template

A reporting format template is provided on the next page. This template is not exhaustive. For example, it does not include financial reports, so you must customize it for your specific reporting needs.

Outcomes Reporting Template

1. Activities:
   Describe the activities you conducted in this reporting period.

2. Outputs:
   Include your output data here.

3. Expected Outcomes:
   Insert your expected outcomes from your Outcome Measurement framework here.

4. Indicators, Sample Size, and Methods:
   Include the indicators you used, as well as the sample size and method used to gather your data.

5. Findings:
   Insert your findings here.

6. Analysis:
   Provide the analysis of your findings here. Are the results positive or negative? Has this project moved you closer to your desired intermediate and long-term outcomes? What could you have done differently?

7. Unintended Outcomes:
   What happened during the course of the project that you didn't anticipate – either positive or negative?

8. Conclusion:
   Briefly summarize your report here.