Six Steps to Effective Program Evaluation: Communicate Your Results (Part 6)

Editor's Note: This is the sixth installment of a series on program evaluation by Bernadette Wright. Scroll to the bottom of this article to see links to all the installments.

The end of your evaluation doesn’t mean that your evaluation stops being valuable. Sharing your results raises awareness of your project and your organization. It shows your value to funders and partnering organizations. It builds trust and buy-in. Plus, others may be inspired to emulate your program, thus expanding the benefits of your program to help more people.

Many Ways to Get the Word Out

Too many evaluations are never shared beyond the funder or manager who requested the study. As a result, powerful insights are lost. Managers and funders in your field fail to learn important lessons and may end up commissioning new studies to rediscover what you’ve already learned. As a result, people don’t get the effective programs they need.

Don’t get me wrong—I enjoy conducting studies (and getting paid for them). However, I also have a strong ethical obligation to help my clients get the biggest bang for their research buck. Also, I have a strong scientific orientation reminding me that the benefits of new research are often outweighed by the availability of existing research results.

You may not have the time or funding to travel the world presenting your results at conferences or preparing meticulous papers for scholarly journals.

Fortunately, several new technologies let you easily share your results; and it will cost you next to nothing:

- Social media (e.g. Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook)
- Your organization’s website
- Blogs (guest posts or on your organization’s own blog)
- Teleconferences
- Webinars
- Newsletters (print, email)
One new technology I’m excited about provides tools for making online interactive diagrams, or “maps.” You can use these maps to present a large amount of information in a very simple picture. These maps are useful for understanding complex situations, coordinating teams and partnering organizations, and discovering new opportunities for increasing program success. Examples include KUMU, InsightMaker, and StormBoard, to name a few. You can share links to your maps on social media or other channels.

Create Your Evaluation Dissemination Plan

In three steps, you can create a practical plan to share your evaluation results far and wide:

1. List Your Evaluation Audiences

First, make a list of audiences who could benefit from seeing your evaluation results.

Tip: For more on identifying and collaborating with stakeholders, see my CharityChannel article on Step 1 to Effective Program Evaluation: Collaborate with Stakeholders.

2. Identify What Information Will Be Most Useful for Each Audience

Next, identify what information from your evaluation each audience will find useful. For example, researchers and policy wonks will probably want to know the nitty-gritty details of your methods and data. Board members and managers will likely want a nontechnical summary of key findings and ideas for strengthening and growing the program. Thinking this through will help you plan disseminate formats that fit the needs of each audience.

3. Identify Strategies to Reach Each Audience

Think about your dissemination strategy to reach each audience. Each strategy will identify delivery channels along with information products—for example, an article in your organization’s newsletter for members, a slide presentation with charts for managers, and a full report for the funder.

Here are some tips:

- Ask stakeholders how they’d like to receive the information.
- Explore the websites of visible organizations in your field and see how they’re sharing their research results. You might get inspired about ways to communicate results that might work for you.
- Be creative. Evaluation results don’t have to be boring. Sharing your evaluation
results in the form of a cartoon can be fun. I’ve also seen a document styled to look like a high school newsletter, with a few short articles about the program and evaluation. Think about what formats for receiving information your audiences might like!

The table below shows some example dissemination strategies, including fast and low-cost or no-cost strategies, to reach various audiences. Sometimes, one strategy can reach more than one audience.

Which and how many strategies you use will depend on your available time and audiences’ information needs. The more audiences you can effectively reach, the more impact you can have!

The table below shows some example audiences, information needs, and dissemination strategies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation Audiences</th>
<th>Information Needs</th>
<th>Dissemination Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation participants, people we serve</td>
<td>Overview of what the evaluation found; next steps</td>
<td>Article in our newsletter; full report provided upon request to evaluation participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funder</td>
<td>Full evaluation report, detailing methods, data, and results</td>
<td>Two-page summary; full report</td>
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<tr>
<td>Partnering organizations</td>
<td>Highlights of key findings and next steps for our collaborative activities</td>
<td>One-page summary of results of shared activities; discussion at meeting with partnering organizations; online interactive “map” showing our inter-connected activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Members/supporters</td>
<td>Return on investment of donations, highlights of our program impact, next steps</td>
<td>Social media; our website; article in our newsletter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our own organization (Board, staff, executive team)</td>
<td>Highlights of findings; ideas for maintaining, strengthening, or growing the program</td>
<td>10-minute presentation of results (with charts) at staff meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other professionals in our field</td>
<td>Highlights of program impact; effective practices; ideas for future related work</td>
<td>Guest blog post for professional association blog; social media (using hashtags that professionals in our field follow)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience</td>
<td>Key Delivery Methods</td>
<td>Key Output</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy analysts, evaluators/researchers</td>
<td>Technical details of methods and data; full details of results; ideas for related programs and policy</td>
<td>Guest blog post for blog that researchers read; social media (using hashtags that researchers follow)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elected officials, policymakers</td>
<td>Brief highlights of key findings related to policy issues</td>
<td>One-page fact sheet with bullet-points summarizing key findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The public</td>
<td>Understanding and awareness of the issue you’re addressing and the need for what you’re doing.</td>
<td>Letter to the editor in local newspaper</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For your next evaluation, you can make a similar chart to show how you will share your evaluation results with your specific audiences. It does not serve your organization or your cause to keep a low profile. Sharing your So that information can benefit more people and means you will make a bigger difference.

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**The Installments of This Six-part Series**

- [Six Steps to Effective Program Evaluation: Collaborate with Stakeholders (Part 1)]
- [Six Steps to Effective Program Evaluation: Understanding Your Program (Part 2)]
- [Six Steps to Effective Program Evaluation: Ask Useful Questions (Part 3)]
Six Steps to Effective Program Evaluation: Review Related Research (Part 4)
Six Steps to Effective Program Evaluation: Plan Your Methods (Part 5)
Six Steps to Effective Program Evaluation: Communicate Your Results (Part 6)