

Reporting & Using Evaluation Results

Reporting Quality Improvement Influencing Marketing

With busy schedules and so many things to think about when creating an evaluation plan, it can be tempting to postpone decisions regarding the results you want from your evaluation until you actually have the results in hand. However, some forethought about how you will use the results will make it more likely that you get the data you will need and ensure it is in a format that will be useful.

Four common uses for evaluation results are:

- reporting
- quality improvement
- influencing
- marketing

Each of these four uses will be discussed below. Also, keep in mind that evaluation results will often not be useful to just one of these four purposes; often the same evaluation data may be used for more than one of these purposes.

Reporting

Evaluation results are often used for reporting purposes, for example annual reports, reports to stakeholders, and project reports.

When you know your evaluation may be used to inform future reports, asking the following questions can help ensure you will get information that will be usable in your reports.

- Who will be the audience of the report?
- What kind of information does this audience want?
- How do they want the information presented?
- What kind of information do we want to provide to this audience?
- What level of detail will be appropriate for this report?
- What format should the report take? What will be the most effective way of presenting the data? Graphs? Narrative? Charts?

Quality Improvement

Perhaps the most common intended use for evaluation results is quality improvement. Much evaluation happens to help answer “How can we do things better?”

It can be helpful to break the process of evaluating for quality improvement into three stages:

The planning stage

The data review stage

The decision making stage

Here are some things to think about at each of these three stages.

The planning stage

In the planning stage you will be trying to design your evaluation activities in such a way as to ensure the results of the evaluation will give you information that will help you make good decisions. The following questions can help you with planning:

- Which programs and services do we want to focus on right now?

- What do we want to know about these particular programs?
- Are there particular changes we are contemplating? If so, what kind of information would we need to determine if these are worthwhile changes?
- Are there particular concerns that we have about this program/service? What kind of information would help us understand this issue more and what would help us understand what we could change?
- What decisions do we want to make? What information do we need to inform those decisions?
- How can we best get that information given the structure of our program?

The data review stage

At the data review stage you will look at the list of decisions you want to make, or questions that you wanted answers to, and see what answers you can find in the data.

As you review the data, you will find evidence that things are working well and/or evidence that there are things that are not working as you wish. When you review your data and discover a problem – for example, you may discover that there are one or more outcomes that you are not adequately achieving, you will next want to identify what caused (or was related to) that underperformance. Here is a series of questions that you can use to guide you as you search for the answer(s) –

Inputs

- Were there sufficient resources? If not, what was lacking?
- Were they the right resources?
- Did staff have adequate knowledge, training, and time, to work towards this outcome?

Processes

- On reviewing the program plan and interventions, are these interventions adequately focused on the intended outcomes? If not, was there anything missing?
- Was the program plan adhered to? If not, what changes were made? Might these changes have impacted the outcomes?
- Might low performance on any of the “quality service factors” have impacted the outcomes? (for example, if students were distracted by noise, were cold and were not concentrating on the content).

Outcomes

- Were the expected outcomes that were set realistic or too optimistic?
- Were the expected outcomes reasonably related to the program content?

As you summarize your findings, you are then able to indicate what areas need improvement based on the problem or underperformance and what you believe may have contributed to this problem.

The decision making stage

Once the data review is complete and you have identified what areas need improvement, you can move on to making decisions about how to improve quality based on the conclusions you can draw from the data. There are two main questions you will be asking at this stage:

- What changes do we want to make?
- What data are we using as evidence that these changes are required/will be useful?
- How will we implement these changes?

Influencing

Information collected through evaluation activities is often used to help with influencing, whether this is influencing decision makers, partners, steering committees, or others. If you want your evaluation results to be useful for influencing, the following questions can help you design your evaluation activities to give you the most useful data.

- Who are we trying to influence?
- What do we want them to do or decide?
- What arguments do we want to make?
- What kind of evidence will support those arguments?
- What kind of information might this audience find compelling?
- What kinds of concerns and counter-arguments might this audience make?
- What evidence could we collect to address their concerns?

Marketing

Sometimes evaluation results can be helpful for marketing purposes. If you want to use evaluation results to help with your marketing efforts, you can think about

- Who are we marketing to?
- What does that particular audience want from our centre?
- What kind of evidence would they find compelling?

Examples of Using Evaluation Results

The following examples show how career centres have used evaluation results for reporting, quality improvement, influencing and/or marketing.

Example	Demonstrates		
Annual Statistical Report Template, Centre for Career Education, University of Windsor	Reporting, Quality Improvement	Overview	
		Worksheet	
Detailed Program Review Template, Centre for Career Education, University of Windsor	Reporting, Quality Improvement	Overview	
		Worksheet	
Example Excerpts from Final Reports, Career Centre, Trent University	Reporting, Influencing	Overview	
		Review Form	
Using Results of the Employment Status Survey, Career Centre, University of Toronto	Reporting, Quality improvement	Overview	
		Survey	

Evaluation Overview End of Year Review, Career Centre, Trent University	Reporting, Quality Improvement	Overview	
		Review Form	
Needs Assessment, Student Success Centre, The University of Western Ontario	Reporting, Quality Improvement, Influencing, Marketing	Overview	
		Survey	
		Letter	