Advocacy & Communication SOLUTIONS

Using Data and Evidence to Demonstrate Program Success

Introduction

Whether you are working to change public policy, improve educational outcomes for children, or reduce chronic disease, you use data to determine how effective your work is and what you can do better. Figuring out how to use data and evidence to manage and improve our efforts often feels overwhelming and intimidating, but it doesn't have to feel that way. In this tool, ACS will help you think through how best to use data and evidence to assess and improve your program or initiative. Before we dive in, let's define some terms that you'll see throughout this tool:

► What is a "program" or "initiative"? A defined set of activities or interventions intended to produce specific outcomes for a particular population.

► What is "impact"? Changes in outcomes produced by the program alone and not caused by other factors.

Step 1: Describe your program.

Before diving into the details, let's focus on the "what." What is your program or initiative aiming to do? How? Write your goal below. Describe how you intend to reach that goal. What is the conceptual roadmap that connects how specific actions will bring about specific outcomes?

An Example

ACS will use the simple example of taking a vacation to walk through the 5 steps outlined in the tool.

Step 1:
You and your family have decided to take a vacation. Everyone agrees that the goal is to have a relaxing time. You and your fellow travelers have agreed on how long you will be gone, the total budget, how you will get there, and how you will spend your time to maximize relaxation.

Step 2:
You want to know whether your vacation is relaxing for everyone while on the trip so you can change plans if needed. Afterward, you want to know if everyone found the vacation relaxing. You also want to learn from the experience for future vacations.

Step 3:
In thinking about what you want to know overall, you identify some key questions to answer during and after the trip:

► Is everyone having a relaxing time? Why or why not?

► Are we on track to complete the activities we agreed to do when we planned our trip?

► Did we achieve our goal of having a relaxing vacation?

This is a great place to use a logic model (see ACS' e-blast about logic models for more on this). Make sure key stakeholders—including staff and funders—are on the same page about what the program or initiative is trying to achieve and how before moving to step 2.

_____

_____

_____

Step 2: Identify what you want to learn about your program/initiative.

In this step, we will introduce two frameworks and help identify which is best for you based on what you need to know.

Select the option below that best describes what you want to learn right now.

☐ **a.** What our program/initiative did and how well it did it. We want information we can use to improve our work.

☐ **b.** Our program/initiative's effect on the people, families, or communities it is serving. We want to know if our program/ initiative is having an impact.

☐ **c.** We want to know both.

Step 3: Identify the questions about your program/initiative that you want to answer.

Below is a list of common questions stakeholders want to answer. Check off the questions you want to answer.

☐ What staff/volunteers are involved in the program/ initiative?

☐ What is the program/initiative budget?

☐ What equipment and materials does the program/ initiative have?

☐ How are program/initiative resources being used?

☐ What are the characteristics of the people who are participating (e.g., demographics)?

☐ How many participants are there?

☐ What services are being delivered?

☐ Who is delivering services?

☐ How well are services being delivered?

☐ How much is each person participating?

☐ What changes do we see in participants (focus on changes that are directly controlled or affected by the program/initiative)?

☐ What interventions were implemented?

☐ Did services get delivered as intended?

☐ Were the right people reached by the program/ initiative? If not, why not?

☐ Were the resources (staff, facilities, equipment, funding) sufficient to accomplish the goals and objectives?

☐ Did staff encounter problems in setting up or running the program/initiative? Were they able to respond to and address all challenges?

☐ Did the program/initiative work?

☐ How well?

☐ What is the return on investment for this program/ initiative?

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→ If you highlighted questions in the light blue section, you are most interested in **Performance Measurement, which tells what a program/initiative did and how well it did it.** The goal is to provide information we can use to improve our work.

→ If you highlighted questions in the light green, you are most interested in **Formative Evaluation, which focuses on how a program/initiative is being designed or carried out**, with the objective of providing information that can be used to improve implementation and results.

→ If you highlighted questions in the light orange, you are most interested in **Summative Evaluation, which focuses on whether a program/initiative reached its goal.**

→ If you highlighted questions in all three sections, you should consider an approach that includes both performance measurement and evaluation.

**There are 3 more steps to go—contact an ACS team member
to learn more and access the full tool.**

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