3

Communicating and Reporting Strategies to Facilitate Learning

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Topics Discussed

- Making Contents Easy to Assimilate
- Short Written Communications
- Interim Reports
- Final Reports
- Executive Summaries
- Newsletters, Bulletins, Briefs, and Brochures
- News Media Communications
- Web Site Communications

Questions to Ponder

☐ *How can evaluators make the contents of their communications and reports more appealing and easy for readers to assimilate?*

☐ *How can different communicating and reporting formats best be used to facilitate individual learning?*

☐ *Which text-based formats are the most appropriate for the different phases of an evaluation?*

I n this chapter we first describe how the contents of evaluation communi-
cations and reports can be designed to enhance individual learning (using
design and layout, tables and figures, and writing). We then present seven
text-based formats that facilitate individual learning (short written commu-
nications; interim reports; final reports; executive summaries; newsletters,
bulletins, briefs, and brochures; news media communications; and Web site
communications). Our goal is for you to consider this information relative to
how individuals learn most effectively. The guidance we provide in each of
these areas has one central theme—making the contents of different text-
based formats easy for individual readers to understand and use.

Making Contents Easy to Assimilate

Evaluators can make the contents of their text-based documents more
readable, appealing, and instructive by paying attention to their design and
layout, using tables and figures to condense information and represent find-
ings, and writing clearly and concisely. We address these three topics below
with further explanation of their importance, implementation tips and cau-
tions, and concrete examples.

Design and Layout

Traditional social science research reports, including many evaluation reports,
typically follow the formatting requirements of the American Psychological
Association's (2001) *Publication Manual*. It calls for headings in a prescribed
format, a single font size, no use of color, and limited graphics and illustrations
(to keep production costs down). This approach serves its purpose well:
submission of formal research reports for publication in academic journals.

Increasingly, reports and communications written for more practical pur-
poses include design elements to enhance readability and appeal to intended
audiences (varied type size and style, generous spacing, and incorporation of
tables, figures, illustrations, and photographs).

Advances in computer hardware and software have made production of
appealing documents significantly easier and less expensive. Word-processing
programs support a variety of styles and formats:

- Variation and differentiation in headings with the use of different type
styles
- Integration of boxed text, charts, graphs, tables, figures, and graphic
images within the main text of the report
- Variation in print color, from multiple shades of gray to a full spectrum
of colors

Use of design elements to enhance readability need not detract from the credibility of evaluation work. "Sharing what you have learned draws from both your systematic and creative sides. You want to engage your audience and, at the same time, convince them that what you are giving them is real" (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 332). The main considerations for the style and format of an evaluation report or communication should be the extent to which it (1) compels people to read it and (2) facilitates the assimilation of its contents. This means avoiding overly academic reporting styles and formats. Figure 3.1 shows a single-page "snapshot" of evaluation findings created in Microsoft Word. It features boxed text, color graphics, and variation in type size. It was created as a companion piece to a final evaluation report and was used for wider distribution among secondary and tertiary audiences. (To view this figure in color, go to http://www.sagepub.com/escr.)

Good visual appearance is increasingly the standard in scientific and technical works. In terms of evaluation use and impact, evaluation communications and reports should be designed to grab and hold readers' attention. Using the tools on desk- or laptop computers, many evaluators or staff within their organizations have the skills to produce reports and communications in these kinds of easily understood and engaging formats. And, some evaluation budgets can support the services of graphic designers and document production companies for a variety of products—reports, executive summaries, and brochures. The following implementation tips for effective design and layout are generally applicable to most types of evaluation documents—complete reports, summaries, memos, brochures, postcards, and Web sites.

Implementation Tips for Design and Layout of Evaluation Communications and Reports

- **Plan for the resources you will need to create your evaluation communications and reports.**

Resources can include anything from additional time needed to format documents, to learning the features of graphics software and computer hardware, to procuring outside services. Planning for document production is especially important if you are using new and/or more creative approaches for the first time.

- **When creating evaluation documents, use design principles that maximize readability.**

The basic design principles for maximizing readability are proximity, alignment, repetition, and contrast (see Williams, 2004). *Proximity* helps organize information and reduce complexity by grouping related items close together. *Alignment* means that every element on a page has some visual

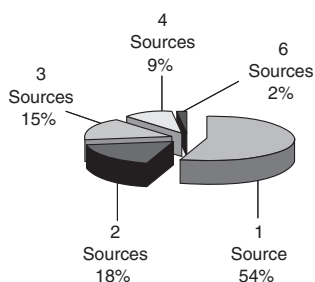# A Snapshot of Home Visitation in LA County

Findings

Indication of service need: Over 137,000 families with children under 5 years old live in poverty in Los Angeles County. (2000 Census)
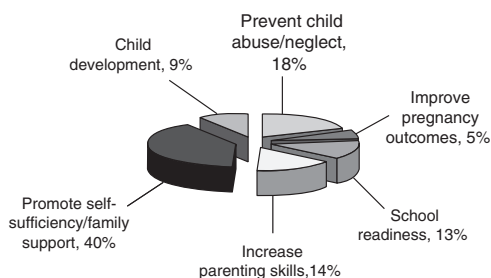
Home Visitation Agency Survey Results:

✓ *Just over a third of the home visitation programs in LA County use a standard curriculum or program model. The most common are Family Preservation, Early Head Start, and Black Infant Health.*

✓ *Most agencies have developed their own programs to serve their client population.*

✓ *The most common services provided in the home are case management/assessment, child abuse prevention, parenting education, growth/development and home safety. Surveyed agencies provide an average of 12 different services in the home to their clients.*

✓ *The average number of home visitors employed by the agencies surveyed is nine, each having an average caseload of 21 clients.*

✓ *Home visitors in LA County serve an estimate 67,383 children each year.*

Note: 28 First 5 LA and 65 other home visitation programs in LA County responded to the survey

Primary Outcome Areas Targeted by Los Angeles County Home Visitation Programs (N = 95)

Child development, 9%
Prevent child abuse/neglect, 18%
Improve pregnancy outcomes, 5%
Promote self-sufficiency/family support, 40%
Increase parenting skills, 14%
School readiness, 13%

Experiences

"Our program acts as a bridge for newly immigrated families, allowing them to cross safely into American society and the school system."

– Home Visitor

"I value the satisfaction I get from watching the families' self-esteem and skills improve, and the bond I form with the families."

– Home Visitor

"Even the services which may seem small to us are big for the family. If a client hasn't seen her mother in a long time and I can facilitate them getting together, that's a big deal for the family."

– Program Administrator

"Home visitation allows for a relationship to start so that families can be introduced to more services."

– Service Provider

Number of Sources Funding Local Home Visitation Programs (N = 95)

4 Sources 9%
6 Sources 2%
3 Sources 15%
2 Sources 18%
1 Source 54%

Serving and Connecting Families and Communities

➢ *Home visitation works best as a system of services, linking clients to other resources.*
➢ *Home visitation is the preferred service delivery strategy for situations where a parent is unwilling to seek services outside the home.*

Figure 3.1   Example of Single-Page Snapshot of Evaluation Findings

SOURCE: Produced by Lodestar Management/Research, Inc. for the First 5 Los Angeles Home Visitation Research & Evaluation Project, April 2003. Report can be found at: http://www.first5.org/ourprojects/homevisitation2.php4.

connection with another element on a page. *Repetition* of colors, shapes, spatial relationships, line thicknesses, fonts, sizes, and graphic concepts develops the organization of a written piece and strengthens its unity. *Contrast* adds visual interest and attracts readers. A well-designed page layout uses these principles to enhance and arrange information on a page. Design elements include spacing, type size and style, headings, headers and footers, columns, color, and tables and graphics.

Figure 3.2 shows a newsletter page from the National Center for Research on Standards and Student Testing (http://cresst96.cse.ucla.edu). It illustrates the design principles of alignment (fuchsia-colored bar in left margin and fuchsia-colored box with page number are aligned vertically); repetition (fuchsia color is used for boxes in left margin and headings, as well as text of call-outs; call-out text is enclosed in a box with light fuchsia shading); and contrast (between deep fuchsia color and white background). (To see this figure in color, go to http://www.sagepub.com/escr.)

In the remaining implementation tips we describe how various design elements can make text-based documents easier for evaluation audiences and users to assimilate.

■ **Break up long stretches of text with lists, boxed text, and tables and graphics.**

Use indented *lists* to improve the readability of a long series of items, and/or to emphasize the contents of the list. *Boxed text* and call-outs provide visual relief and highlight important information. *Tables and graphics* include charts and graphs, illustrations, and photographs (see the next section for more detail on these items). Tables are more efficient than text for presenting large amounts of data. As shown in Figure 3.1, graphics create interest and are more memorable than text.

■ **Choose a typeface consistent with the length and formality of the evaluation document.**

Serif typefaces are the best choice for the large amounts of text typically found in evaluation reports. They are defined by their stylistic finishing lines, and are highly readable. More plainly styled sans serif typefaces are better suited for headings (see main heading of Figure 3.1). Figure 3.3 shows examples of serif and sans serif typefaces.

■ **Design reports in easily understood and engaging formats to enhance their readability.**

The main considerations for the style and format of a final report should be the extent to which it (1) compels people to read it and (2) facilitates the

Di Weddell of the Australia Commonwealth Department of Education and Peter Titmanis of the Western Australia Education Department described how a sampling procedure has been used to equate the tests from the different jurisdictions. Expert judges, using an item pool from all of the tests, developed a common scale based on level of difficulty and a cut score on the scale. This allows each jurisdiction to calculate the proportion of their students who had a score at or above the benchmark on their own scale. The sample approach won over state officials, according to Titmanis.

CHILE

A new assessment in Chile measures higher order thinking skills, using both multiple-choice and extended response formats. Given for the first time to fourth graders in

> The first year's data revealed that student performance in public schools and in subsidized private schools was not significantly different.

1999, it will expand to eighth grade soon and is intended to assess school performance, according to Claudia Matus of the Chile Ministry of Education. The first year's data revealed that student performance in public schools and in subsidized private schools was not significantly different. Officials are dealing with issues of reliable scoring on open-ended questions, generating appropriate items for higher order skills, and informing the public.

KOREA

Korea is now implementing its seventh revision of a national curriculum since 1948, according to Sung-Sook Kim and Hye-Sook Kim of the Korea Institute of Curriculum and Evaluation. Through Grade 10, the curriculum is differentiated based on ability. In Grades 11-12, the curriculum is different for students based on their interests and career choices. The revised curriculum reduces content coverage by 30%.

Korea has three types of assessments: school activity records that evaluate students; a National Assessment of Educational Achievement, which controls the quality of the system by providing information on overall educational achievement; and a college scholastic ability test administered nationally. The reforms advocate replacing a norm-referenced system with a criterion-referenced system and using student records for diagnostic purposes as well as a cumulative evaluation.

SINGAPORE

Unlike Korea's homogeneous population, Singapore is multi-cultural with four official languages; English is the primary language of administration. Singapore has gone through several education reforms with the latest reform characterized by five features: bilingual-

> Assessment data are used to determine promotion to the next grade, and streaming (placement), and as feedback to pupils on their readiness for the national exams.

ism (English and a mother tongue); streaming, the placement of students in different levels at primary, secondary and pre-university points); special curriculum for each stream; curriculum and assessment in two languages plus math up to Grade 10; and compulsory but nontested moral, physical and national education through Grade 12. According to Quek Choon Lang and Toh Hoon Sin of the Singapore Ministry of Education, the assessment system consists of school-based assessment by teachers and national exams at Grades 6, 10, and 12. Assessment data are used to determine promotion to the next grade and streaming (placement), and as feedback to pupils on their readiness for the national exams.

THAILAND

Based on 1999 reforms, Thailand's new assessment framework will be instituted in 2002. The reforms decentralize authority and shift assessment responsibility to schools,

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The CRESST Line

Figure 3.2   Example of Page Layout Illustrating the Design Principles of Alignment, Repetition, and Contrast

SOURCE: Used with permission of National Center for Research on Standards and Student Testing

Serif Typefaces	Sans Serif Typefaces
Times New Roman	Arial
Lucida Bright	Lucida Sans
Century Schoolbook	Century Gothic
Palatino	
Garamond	

Figure 3.3   Examples of Serif and Sans Serif Typefaces

assimilation of its contents. This means avoiding overly academic reporting styles and formats, and too much print per page. Figure 3.4 shows an example of a summarized version of an evaluation report that is formatted for easy reading. The headings for different report sections are placed on the left side of the page, and the main points of the text are arranged in bullets down the right side of the page, leaving plenty of white space on each page.

■ **Use columns to make text more inviting.**

Columns give evaluation documents a more professional look. They are commonly used in newspapers and other commercial publications because a shorter line of text is read faster than a full line of text. Columns can be justified or flush left. Left-justified text with a right jagged edge is friendlier, less formal, and adds more white space to the page. Design your evaluation reports, summaries, and newsletters with no more than two or three columns of text.

■ **Use signposts, headers, and/or footers to help readers find their way around, especially in longer reports.**

Organizing elements are essential to help reduce the complexity of and enhance readers' ability to assimilate long evaluation reports. In addition to headers or footers identifying report sections, graphics and creative use of headings can guide the reader through a report. Figure 3.5 shows a one-page excerpt from a lengthy evaluation report. The vertical side headings, different colors for different levels of headings, and bullets were repeated throughout the report to enhance its visual appeal and guide the reader. (To see this figure in color, go to http://www.sagepub.com/escr.)

| **Table of Contents** | Summary ………………..#

Overview
of Program ……….……..#

Evaluation
Methods …………….…..#

Findings …………….…..#

Recommendations….…...# | **Summary** | HEADING

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Figure 3.4   Example of Half-Page Report Format

Key Outcomes

Outcomes for Participants (the strongest result of FCL):

The major finding from the 1993 evaluation is that the program appeared to be succeeding in its goals of increasing participants' understanding of leadership and policy issues and methods useful in their resolution, as well as increasing participation in public and family affairs.

In addition to increasing their knowledge and involvement, most participants felt the program was worthwhile and, if given the choice, most would participate in FCL again.

Homemakers experienced the most benefits from participation in FCL. The most meaningful outcomes from participation were increased confidence and improved leadership skills.

Leadership Outcomes:
- Overall, participants indicated moderate to substantial increases in all aspects of leadership skills.

Self-Confidence:
- At least 85 percent of participants reported moderate to substantial increases in self-awareness and personal growth (particularly homemakers), and over 20 percent increased their education since completing FCL (typically CES staff).

Public Affairs Interest and Skills:
- The majority of participants felt their public affairs interests and skills, and their confidence in public affairs abilities improved at least moderately. However, the extent of change in these areas was somewhat less dramatic than the growth in leadership skills.

Participation in Public and Community Affairs:
- Participants in the FCL program tended to be very active in their communities prior to FCL training, and their involvement appears to have increased even further following the program.

The Multiplier Effect:

The evaluation examined the multiplier effect and found that it worked well. The program demonstrates an effective degree of dissemination or "multiplier" effect with apparent ability to produce results at the second and even third level of people trained in the model.

Outcomes for Organizations:

Although not specifically stated, a goal of FCL was to strengthen the partnership organizations in FCL and the relationships between them. The very structure of FCL, the teaming of CES agents and volunteers in training and payback teams brought about a parity in the relationship that hardly existed before.

Figure 3.5   One-Page Excerpt From Lengthy Final Report Showing Creative Use of Headers to Orient Readers

SOURCE: Used with permission of W. K. Kellogg Foundation.

■ **Use clip art or other graphic images to improve the overall look of evaluation documents, convey meaning, and/or reduce complexity.**

Figure 3.6 shows a one-page newsletter article about a regional collaborative in Minnesota that supports youth programs. The article describes the work of the collaborative, evaluation efforts to document attitude changes, and interpretation of findings and action planning with stakeholders. The two photographs depict young people actively involved in two of the programs—one, a summer arts program; and the other, an arts and drug-prevention program themed "Don't Mess Around With Horses." These photographs are both appealing and meaningful—two primary considerations for clip art or graphic images used in evaluation communications. Make sure the images you use specifically relate to the document content and are meaningful for intended audiences. Avoid gratuitous use of readily available clip art or unrelated photographs. (See Chapter 4 for in-depth information on using photography in evaluations.)

■ **Avoid overdesign.**

The easy-to-use features of word-processing programs can at once be an advantage and a liability. It can be tempting to go overboard! Too many design elements can detract, rather than add to, an evaluation document's appeal and readability. Begin with the basic guidance for enhancing your design and layout provided in this section. Add features with an eye to their cumulative effect, and get feedback on the overall look of your piece.

■ **Use a consistent page layout and format for various evaluation documents seen by the same audience.**

If several reports or other written pieces will be produced from your evaluation, format them in the same way. Consistency improves reader comfort, and helps readers find and assimilate information more easily. Carry overall design and color elements from one piece to another. The format might even contain a particular logo, creating an identity for the evaluation project and/or a program or organization.

Tables and Figures

Visual forms of information, such as tables and figures, are commonly used as effective tools for communicating and reporting evaluation findings. They condense information and can leave the audience with a lasting image. If you are making a short presentation or constructing a visual display, the use of tables and figures will allow audiences to quickly absorb a large quantity of data while still imparting the essence of the evaluation findings. Not only can these methods provide a framework or referent for discussing key findings, but visual representations of data can reveal patterns, trends, and relationships that are not apparent in the text, thus allowing for easier comparisons

Several churches have banded together to hold summer arts programs. At left, young people "wear" their masks, the products of one recent handicraft seminar.

REGIONAL NETWORK HELPS YOUTH IN RURAL MINNESOTA FIND HEALTHY FUN

Fighting years of tradition and practice, a region of Minnesota is undergoing a powerful change. Underage drinking and tobacco use, once regarded as a "rite of passage," is gradually being seen instead as a threat to its youth.

This shift has been the work of hundreds of volunteers and every institution from school, church, police, government, even a widows' book club.

Providing the backbone is the Region Nine Prevention and Healthy Communities Network, led by Executive Director Anne Ganey. The Region Nine PHC Network binds together 13 coalitions toward a common goal: decreasing drug, alcohol and tobacco abuse by young people. The staff helps the coalitions with activities that span the gamut from mentoring to garage band concerts to community service stints and provides support and valuable resources.

Picture the region: 72 cities and 147 townships, 45 of which have populations under 1,000, 18 more with populations under 2,500. The area has undergone rapid change since the 1980s farm crisis, which resulted in rapid depopulation, school consolidations and centralization of jobs, services and recreational opportunities.

"We are working on systems change," Ganey said. "A large part of our mission is to help each community partnership tailor programs that will work for them, for their size, their particular population mix and develop new leaders to carry on the work."

Ganey stresses that "this work is not about finding a program that works in one town and then replicating it." Part of the challenge is helping funders understand this.

From its inception 10 years ago, Ganey says Region Nine has always been a science-based program using local data and the community-organizing model." This made being designated as a *Wanted: Solutions for America* site a perfect fit.

"*Wanted* came along when we were beginning to investigate the possibility of working with an evaluator, Laura Bloomberg," Ganey said. "We have great interest in proving scientifically that what we do works. *Wanted* made this possible."

Bloomberg, who has her own consulting firm, has focused her work with the Region Nine PHC Network toward documenting the attitude changes and tying them back to the work being done in the communities.
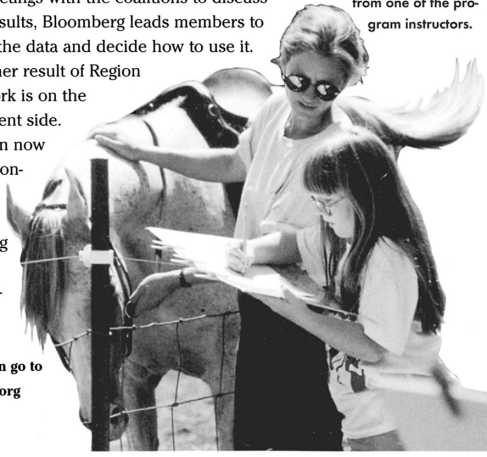
"There is clearly evidence that youth are making healthier decisions and communities are increasingly aware of the challenges youth face making these decisions," Bloomberg said. "We can definitely chart tremendous progress."

In 12 months, one survey showed 5 percent *more* people believe alcohol abuse among young adults is a moderate to big problem, and 37 percent *more* believed their community partnership efforts were very likely to result in a decrease in alcohol use.

In meetings with the coalitions to discuss survey results, Bloomberg leads members to interpret the data and decide how to use it.

Another result of Region Nine's work is on the enforcement side. The region now has a region-wide drug policy, making enforcement consistent. **For more information go to www.rndc.org**

Maple River Community Network held an arts and prevention program involving horses as a medium and a message and called it "Don't Horse Around With Drugs." Here a young participant gets some help with her drawing from one of the program instructors.

Figure 3.6   Example of Newsletter Article With Appealing and Meaningful Photographs

SOURCE: Used with permission of Pew Partnership for Civic Change.

among the data. Audiences are more likely to discuss findings represented in tables and graphics or other visual displays, because this information is quite often more easily assimilated. In this section, we provide an overview of tables and figures (which include graphs, charts, and illustrations), and provide guidance for their development and use.

Tables

Tables present numbers or text in rows and columns to show identifiable relationships and trends. They are convenient for presenting a large quantity of data. Because they emphasize discrete rather than continuous data, tables are not well suited for showing trends or directions in the data. In some ways, then, tables are not predominantly visual—the reader must translate one number into a relationship with every other number. Therefore, tables are most useful when it is important to provide a significant amount of information with great precision in a very small space, as shown in Figure 3.7. This table presents data on several variables: school, grade-level grouping, recommended days of implementation, mean number of days teachers implemented, and percentage of recommended days teachers implemented.

Table 8
Average Number of Days per Week Teachers
Provided Instruction in Reading Curriculum
by School and Grade-Level Group

Year-End Findings												
School	Grade K *Recommended: 2 days*				Grades 1–2 *Recommended: 3 days*				Grades 3–6 *Recommended: 4 days*			
	N	Mean	SD	%*	N	Mean	SD	%*	N	Mean	SD	%*
A	4	1.88	.25	94%	9	2.44	.53	81%	10	3.35	.67	84%
B	5	2.00	.00	100%	6	2.17	.75	72%	13	3.69	.48	92%
C	2	2.00	.00	100%	8	2.25	.71	75%	9	3.00	1.00	75%
D	3	2.00	.00	100%	5	2.10	.22	70%	4	2.50	1.00	63%
E	5	2.00	.00	100%	9	2.78	.44	93%	9	3.33	.87	83%
F	3	2.00	.00	100%	6	2.50	.55	83%	9	3.11	.78	78%
G	N/A				N/A				3	3.00	.00	75%
	3	1.33	.58	63%	7	2.29	.76	73%	8	2.56	1.05	64%
All Schools	25	1.90	.29	95%	50	2.39	.60	80%	65	3.17	.84	79%

*Percentage of recommended days

Figure 3.7   Example of Table Used to Present Quantitative Data

Tables can also be effective for organizing and displaying text—for example, to provide an overview of program and/or evaluation activities. Follow these guidelines when constructing tables:

Guidelines for Constructing Tables

- Assign each table an Arabic number if you are using several tables.
- Present tables sequentially within the text.
- Always place the title immediately above the table.
- Make each quantitative table self-explanatory by providing titles, keys, labels, and footnotes so that readers can accurately understand and interpret them without reference to the text.
- When a table must be divided so it can be continued on another page, repeat the row and column headings and give the table number at the top/bottom of each new page.

Figures

We use the term "figure" here to denote any chart, graph, or illustration used to convey quantitative or qualitative data in a visual form. Charts and graphs can present statistical and complex data fairly quickly and easily. Illustrations include diagrams, maps, or drawings. Consider the different purposes that each type of figure serves, as shown in Table 3.1.

A *pie chart* is a very simple chart depicting 100% of a variable divided into parts, or "slices," to show relationships of each part to the whole and to the others parts. As shown in Figure 3.8, an extended pie chart can be used to present the findings of a survey question as well as its follow-up question (see Brown, Marks, & Straw, 1997). (To see this figure in color, go to http://www.sagepub.com/escr.)

Table 3.1   Purposes of Different Types of Figures

Figure Type	*Purpose*
Charts	Depicting processes, elements, roles, or other parts of some larger entity, and its organization or interdependencies
Graphs	Presenting data and relationships that show trends, movements, distributions, and cycles
Illustrations	Conveying a visual representation of ideas that are difficult to express in words in a short period of time or space

**Parent Opinion About Need for
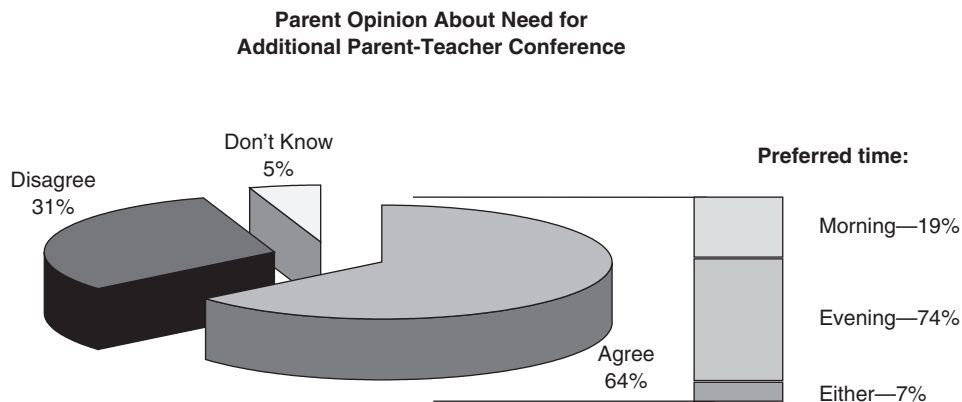Additional Parent-Teacher Conference**

Figure 3.8   Example of Extended Pie Chart Showing Responses to Survey
Question and Follow-Up Question

When constructing pie charts, follow these guidelines:

Guidelines for Constructing Pie Charts

- Use six or fewer slices to illustrate information.
- Arrange the slices with the largest or the most important data start-
ing at the 12 o'clock position, and the remaining slices positioned in
a clockwise fashion.
- Increase the readability of pie charts by using bright, contrasting
colors to emphasize a certain piece of data or by moving a slice out
from the circle. (Most computer graphing programs allow you to
do this.)
- Label the pie slices on the slices themselves or right next to them.
- If you use three-dimensional pie charts, be aware that distortions of
the data are possible because the slices that seem closest to the viewer
will be deemed the most important ones.

Bar charts can be quickly constructed and are also easy to understand.
They are particularly effective for showing (1) quantities associated with one
variable at different times; (2) quantities of different variables for the same
period; or (3) quantities of the different parts of a variable that make up the
whole (Lannon, 1991). Figure 3.9 illustrates a clustered bar chart to show a
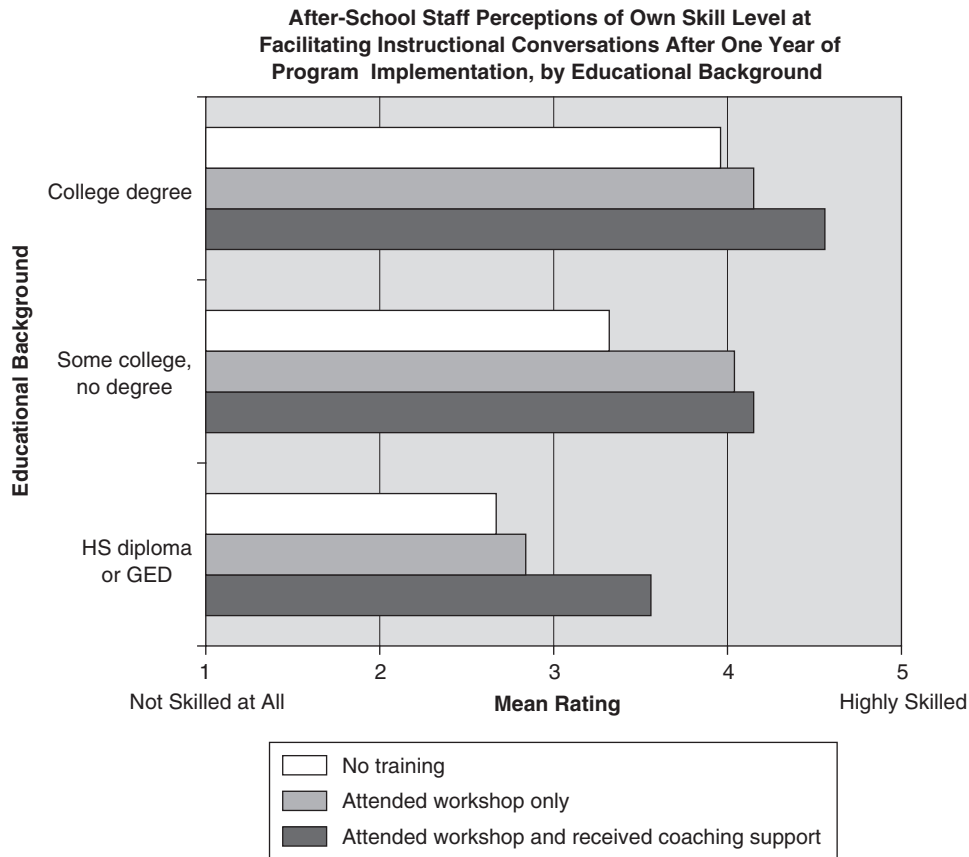three-way comparison (see Bonnet, 1997). (To see this figure in color, go to
http://www.sagepub.com/escr.)

**After-School Staff Perceptions of Own Skill Level at
Facilitating Instructional Conversations After One Year of
Program Implementation, by Educational Background**

Figure 3.9   Example of Clustered Bar Chart to Show a Three-Way Comparison

When constructing bar charts, follow these guidelines:

Guidelines for Constructing Bar Charts

- Use as few bars as possible. Six is typically considered the maximum unless you are showing data over a 12-month period.
- Emphasize one aspect of the data by changing a bar's color or texture.
- To make the data in the chart easier to comprehend, (a) place the numbers showing each bar's value at the top of the bar or inside it in a contrasting color, or (b) draw horizontal lines across the chart, beginning at each interval of the vertical axis.
- Use patterns of icons or blocks of color to make the image more attractive to the eye. For example, use apples or figures for students to show an increase in student achievement. Most programs allow you to modify the size and shape of the selected images to fit the size of the chart.

**Performance of 2nd-, 3rd-, and 4th-Grade Students in Spring 2002
compared to
Performance of 2nd-, 3rd-, and 4th-Grade Students in Spring 2003**
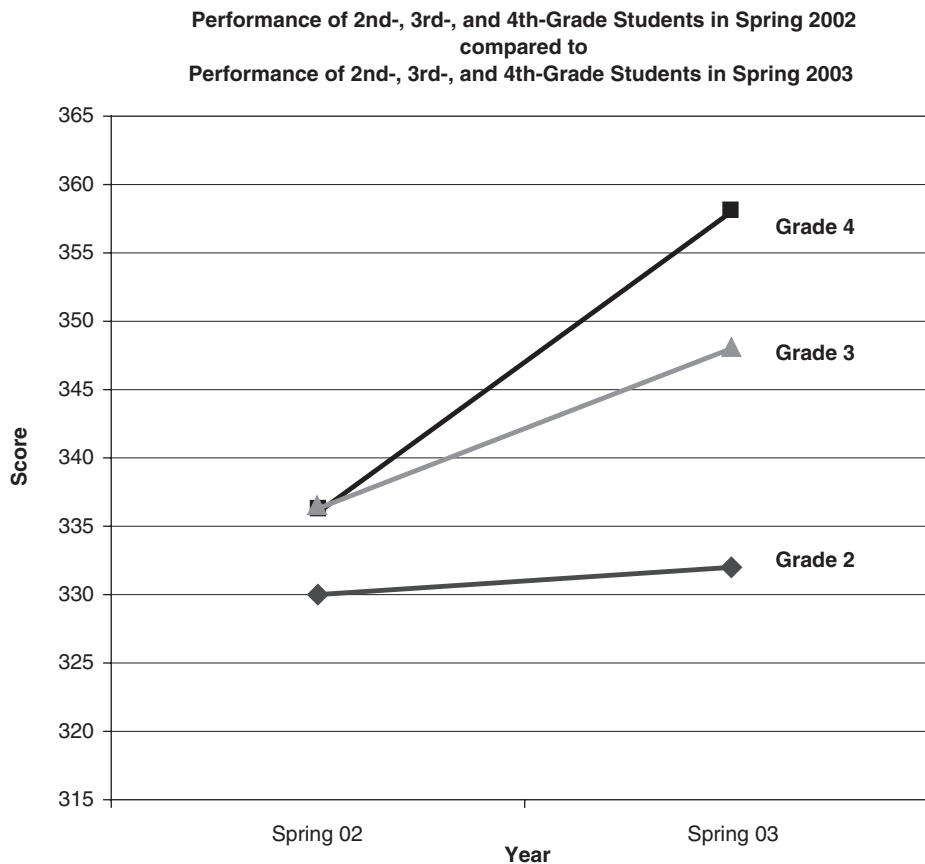
Figure 3.10   Example of Line Graph Distinguishing Student Performance by Grade
Level

The *line graph* is an effective tool for conveying two types of information when there are several points that must be plotted or where there are small changes between the points. Data are plotted on the graph to form one or more continuous lines that enable complex quantitative data to become visually understandable. Figure 3.10 shows a line graph distinguishing student performance by grade level. (To see this figure in color, go to http://www .sagepub.com/escr.)

When constructing line graphs, follow these guidelines:

Guidelines for Constructing Line Graphs

- Label the lines rather than using a legend.
- Three lines are the recommended maximum, and each should be a different color if possible, with the most important line being the brightest color.

- If printing in black and white, each line should be a different shape or texture.
- Always title the graph clearly and concisely at the center of the page, above or below the graph.

Figure 3.11 is a form of a line graph that shows change in quantitative data. Both the color and the movement of the lines are used to show mean differences over time (pre-test to post-test, for example) in a group's knowledge about five different skill sets. Each vertical bar depicting one of the five levels of knowledge (from "not yet familiar with concepts" to "fully able to apply") is a different color. Each of the five arrowheads representing the post-test finding for each skill set is shown in a shade of the vertical bar color to which it is closest. (To see this figure in color, go to http://www.sagepub.com/escr.)
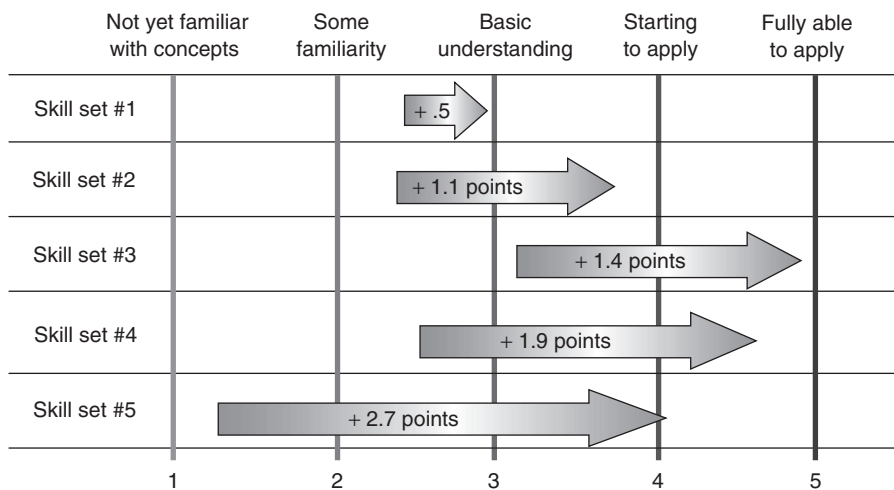
Figure 3.11   Example of Figure to Represent Change in Quantitative Data

SOURCE: Used with permission of Jane Davidson.

Up to this point we have discussed visual forms of representation most useful for presenting quantitative data. Evaluators who wish to visually describe aspects of qualitative data, however, should consider using *illustrations* such as diagrams, flow charts, maps, cartoons, or drawings. Case Example 3.1 describes how the use of illustrations positively affected an audience's understanding and appreciation of a complex and difficult issue.

CASE EXAMPLE 3.1

When Words Alone Can't Get the Job Done

An evaluator was asked to assess the effects of change on individuals within a university department where job descriptions and responsibilities were shifting as a result of the university's reorganization. The evaluator realized that the staff might be hesitant to verbally communicate their reactions and thoughts about the change process through the usual interview process. Therefore, as one of her evaluation methods she asked program staff to draw their images of the "old" organization and what they hoped for in the "new" organization. After participants illustrated their thoughts, she asked them to explain what they had drawn. One year later, near the end of the evaluation study, she went back to each of the participants and showed them their drawings. During this session she asked them to add anything they thought would further the evaluator's understanding of how they experienced the changes that were occurring. For the most part, the drawings depicted people who were confused and concerned, not only about their future but also about the university's.

The evaluator then analyzed the drawings in light of the other data she had collected. When she presented the evaluation findings in a verbal presentation to the university's administration, she showed selected drawings on an overhead projector to help explain what she had found. The reaction of the administrators was one of surprise and realization. They admitted they had not thought out all the implications of the change effort for the people who worked in the unit. Several mentioned that the illustrations confirmed that the changes had indeed had a demoralizing effect on some of the employees. The evaluator believes that, without the drawings, the administrators would not have gained as deep an understanding of the human side of change so quickly. It is unlikely that her words alone, even supported by verbatim quotes from the employees, would have had such an impact.

Figure 3.12 presents an illustration used to depict various stakeholders and their relationship to each other for an after-school enrichment program. Illustrations like this can be created in PowerPoint (see section on verbal presentations in Chapter 4) and shown in a staged presentation to audiences, allowing them to build understanding as each component is added to the figure. The result in this case is a comprehensive view of the program's stakeholders, which in particular, meets the needs of visual learners.
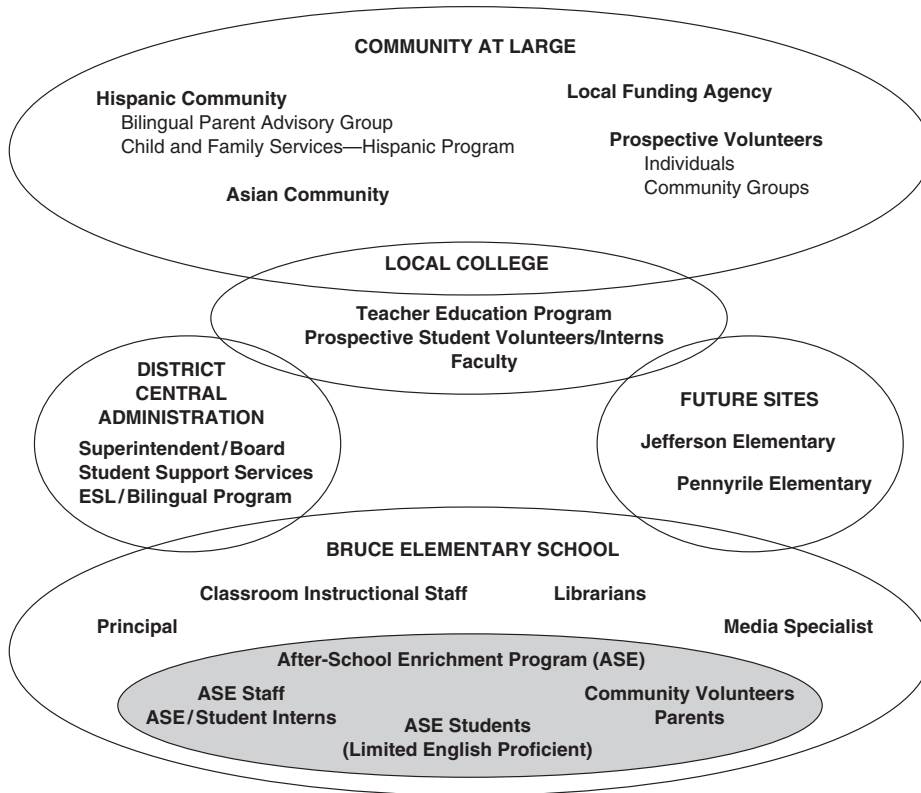
COMMUNITY AT LARGE

Hispanic Community
Bilingual Parent Advisory Group
Child and Family Services—Hispanic Program

Local Funding Agency

Prospective Volunteers
Individuals
Community Groups

Asian Community

LOCAL COLLEGE

Teacher Education Program
Prospective Student Volunteers/Interns
Faculty

**DISTRICT
CENTRAL
ADMINISTRATION**

Superintendent/Board
Student Support Services
ESL/Bilingual Program

FUTURE SITES

Jefferson Elementary

Pennyrile Elementary

BRUCE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Classroom Instructional Staff   **Librarians**

Principal   **Media Specialist**

After-School Enrichment Program (ASE)

ASE Staff   **Community Volunteers**
ASE/Student Interns   **Parents**
ASE Students
(Limited English Proficient)

Figure 3.12 Example of an Illustration to Show Comprehensive View of Stakeholders
for After-School Program

When creating illustrations, follow these guidelines:

Guidelines for Creating Illustrations

- Keep the illustration as simple as possible—if it needs a lot of explanation, it is probably too complicated.
- Be careful not to over-illustrate within any one communication. Save the use of illustrations for instances where they make a significant contribution to communicating your message.
- Include a key that identifies or defines all the symbols used.
- Depending on its dimensions, present the illustration in a horizontal position for easy reading.
- Provide enough white space around and within the illustration.
- Make sure that the illustration's meaning is clearly described in the text.

Implementation Tips for Using Tables and Figures

■ **Think about the essence of the message and the type of presentation that will describe it most accurately and effectively.**

When deciding to use tables and figures, evaluators need to ask themselves, "What am I trying to say with this visual?" The message and the type of data you have determine the type of representation that describes the data most accurately and effectively.

Remember that your evaluation questions can provide a guide for thinking about the information that will be useful to represent in tables and figures. Because these are the major questions you are seeking to answer and those that the stakeholders will be most interested in, it is likely that presenting data in terms of the evaluation questions will be especially effective.

■ **Compile all available summarized data.**

To most effectively and efficiently develop tables and figures, it is important to have summarized data readily available. That is, begin organizing descriptions of the program, data summary sheets from surveys and interviews, computer analyses, and so forth as soon as possible after data are collected.

■ **Keep your tables and figures simple.**

Wanting to provide as much information as possible in tables and figures often leads evaluators to overload the table or figure. This is especially true with figures that try to describe program theories, models of implementation, linkages between various program components, and complex quantitative findings. Evaluators need to carefully consider the primary audiences for each table or figure, weighing the effects of creating a complex table or figure, which may inhibit rather than enhance understanding. When several layers of information are required to illustrate a finding or circumstance accurately, consider presenting the information in stages (using a PowerPoint presentation, for example) building in complexity with each piece that is shown.

■ **Include headings and titles for all tables and figures.**

If you are using several tables and figures, assign a number to each one throughout the text. Each table or figure should have a title and clear headings describing the type of data it reports. Generally, tables and figures should be as self-explanatory as possible. Some readers will focus primarily on the tables and figures in a report.

■ **If including tables and figures in the text, describe the information to be found in each.**

When you insert a table or figure into the text, also include an explanation and/or interpretation of its meaning. Make sure that the visual is as close as possible to the text explaining it. Never assume that a reader will fully understand the visual and its implications. Given people's different learning styles, some readers will skip the visuals. If no written explanation is presented, they may miss an important finding.

■ **Construct the tables and figures first, then write the text.**

Producing effective tables and figures results in your thoroughly understanding the trends and relationships among the variables in question. When these are clearly understood, it is easier to write the supporting interpretations and explanations of the findings.

■ **Make tables and figures accessible within a report.**

Because the purpose of using visuals is to make findings more understandable, tables and figures should be easily accessible within a formal report. The reader who wants to think more about a visual or share it with someone should be able to quickly locate it within the report. If there are more than five tables or figures, they should be listed in a table of figures by title, along with the page number where each can be found. This list immediately follows the table of contents for the text.

■ **Do not overuse color.**

The use of color in visuals is an area where evaluators should be cautious. In the desire to make visuals eye-catching and appealing it is tempting to use a variety of colors. A few carefully chosen colors are much more effective. Strong primary colors used consistently throughout a series of visuals best command an audience's attention (Parker, 1992). However, more than three colors in a visual can be confusing to readers.

■ **Allow sufficient time for developing tables and figures.**

For most types of evaluation data, a table or figure is essential for effectively communicating findings. Remember that several drafts typically are necessary to produce high-quality tables and figures. Evaluators need to plan for the cost and time it takes to develop tables and figures—particularly if expert in-house designers or software are not readily available.

■ **Always present tables and figures to outside audiences with a verbal or written explanation.**

If disseminated without a written or verbal explanation, tables and figures can be misused and misinterpreted. Outside audiences may not understand the statistics, scaling methods used, or relationships among sets of data. The result may be oversimplification of the data, leading to interpretations and conclusions that could adversely affect program participants and other stakeholders.

Writing

Almost nothing is more important to written communication than clarity and readability. Writing in a clear, jargon-free, reader-focused style is essential to help assure that audiences understand and use the information conveyed in evaluation products. Without clear and effective communication, even the most well-designed and implemented evaluation's impact will be weakened (Kingsbury & Hedrick, 1994).

When producing evaluation products, most evaluators draw on whatever training in writing they have received in undergraduate and graduate courses. This may or may not be sufficient to make them good writers of evaluation communications and reports. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Inspector General believes that the overall success of an audit or evaluation depends on the evaluator's ability to communicate the results in a clear and concise manner. Toward this end they provide training for their auditors, inspectors, and evaluators in communications courses that cover report writing and editing, and writing to the point (Office of Inspector General, 2004). The following implementation tips provide ideas that you can use immediately to improve your writing (but should not be considered a substitute for courses or workshops that you might also take). Remember that clarifying your writing has a major benefit: in the process you have the opportunity to clarify your thinking. Writing and thinking processes are inextricably linked.

⇨ *Implementation Tips for Writing*

■ **Avoid jargon and technical terms that your audience may not understand.**

One respondent to our survey on evaluators' communicating and reporting practices (Torres et al., 1997) put it this way:

> I do not speak in tongues but provide basic information which is not dressed in the cloak of sophisticated statistical language. What is reported must be almost instantly comprehended.

Not surprisingly, terminology that is unfamiliar to audiences will interfere with their understanding. Complex terminology can appear in evaluation reports in two ways. Evaluators sometimes use it to describe qualitative or quantitative methodologies, or they may use it to describe unique aspects of a particular program.

Madison (2000) describes the successful evolution of language in evaluations: "The language used in evaluating social programs encompasses the language of social policy, which is interpreted into the technical language of evaluation, which is then translated into language to meet the informational needs of multiple audiences" (p. 17). Evaluators must take care that these translations occur and should carefully scrutinize each written communication to reduce its complexity while bearing in mind its intended audience. Terminology specific to a program is appropriate for a detailed final report read primarily by program participants, whereas a summary of the same evaluation findings presented in a bulletin and distributed to other audiences should be written in simpler terms. The choice of language can directly affect audiences' perceptions of a program, and ultimately, decisions they make on the basis of the evaluation results.

Choosing the appropriate style of writing requires that evaluators know their different audiences. The Program Evaluation Standard on Human Interactions (P4) provides guidance to "make every effort to understand the culture, social values, and language differences of participants" (Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation, 1994). As stated earlier, we typically identify audiences at the outset of an evaluation. Subsequent experiences with audiences who are also stakeholders can help us know how to best communicate with them in writing. One option is to work with stakeholders and other audiences to derive clear, understandable language that is both true to sophisticated concepts and comprehensible to various groups. Another possibility is to provide a highly visible section that defines key terms (e.g., inside the front cover of a report). (Chapter 6 presents more information on communicating and reporting for diverse audiences.)

■ **Adopt a direct, conversational style.**

Except for evaluation reports published in scholarly journals, a conversational style is more appropriate than an academic style for most of our audiences. Some evaluators write in both venues and should take care that they do not slip back into an academic style when writing for stakeholders and other audiences.

Try to write in the language you would use in a serious conversation (Scott, 1989). This typically means using only as many words as necessary to make your point. For instance, limiting consecutive prepositional phrases can usually make your writing more concise. The next two tips on long sentences and passive voice describe other ways to keep written communications to the point.

■ **Check the clarity of long sentences.**

Long sentences are more difficult for readers to comprehend. Even when evaluators know exactly what they are trying to say, their writing can be confusing to readers if their sentences contain too many ideas. One helpful technique is to read aloud what you have written. Convoluted writing is sometimes more evident to the ear than to the eye.

You will find that some 25- or 30-word sentences are understandable. They should, however, be interspersed with shorter sentences. Variety in sentence length creates a rhythm and makes your writing more interesting to read. A document replete with short sentences sounds choppy; one containing only long sentences is difficult to follow. Finally, consider using bullets or other conventions to break up long sentences, e.g., using (1), (2), (3), and so on to number common elements within the sentence.

■ **Limit the use of passive voice.**

Writing in the active voice makes information clear, direct, and accessible to the reader. It helps keep writing more concise because it generally requires fewer words. There are, however, some instances where the use of passive voice is appropriate, such as when the subject of a sentence is clearly implied or unimportant. You should limit your use of passive voice to those instances. The following guidelines are designed to help you express active voice in your writing.

Guidelines for Writing in Active Voice

- Place the subject matter of the sentence at the beginning of the sentence.
- Place the verb close to the subject.
- Avoid making the subject matter the object of some action.
- Avoid "-ion" words (Scott, 1989; Williams, 1989).

■ **Use word-processing tools for spelling, grammar, and writing style.**

Word-processing programs feature writing tools such as a spelling and grammar editor and a thesaurus. Spelling editors check documents for misspelled words, duplicate words, and irregular capitalization. Although these programs will catch most errors, you must still proofread documents to find instances where a misspelled word in one context is a correctly spelled one in another (e.g., from/form, word/work).

Grammar checkers scan documents for grammar and style errors by looking for certain word patterns. Typically, they flag long sentences, passive

voice, consecutive prepositional phrases, split infinitives, and consecutive nouns. For some errors, these programs suggest revisions. Most programs also allow for customizing the editing style the program uses (e.g., scientific writing, fiction, or informal memos).

A word-processing thesaurus provides synonyms and antonyms for words within your document. This program is especially useful for finding words to simplify the language of your document and to combat repetitiveness.

■ **To improve your writing, write and rewrite.**

Almost nothing is more time consuming than writing and rewriting. Yet nothing is more effective to make you a better writer. Rewriting should be done based on constructive feedback. One method is to have someone else review part of your writing so that you can get ideas about how to improve it. Ideally, the reviewer will give you specific suggestions for how convoluted sentences, passive voice, or unappealing tone can be rewritten. A reviewer might also provide advice about choice of vocabulary for specific audiences (avoiding jargon and defining acronyms) and organizing content for maximum clarity and impact. Stay open and try not to be too sensitive about the feedback you receive; the focus should be on producing the best written communication for its intended audiences.

Another way to revise a document is to use a grammar editor included in word-processing programs, as noted above. Most feature an interactive mode that allows you to make changes in your document while you consider the revisions suggested by the program.

Most writers will see an improvement in their work as soon as they spend some time on revisions. At this point, they begin to realize the biggest time-saver: an improvement in the quality of first drafts.

■ **Use collaborative writing to stimulate creativity and reduce individual workloads.**

Many evaluations are conducted by teams of evaluators whose members can help produce written communication about the evaluation. Collaborative writing can result in a better product. Discussion and feedback among team members can stimulate thinking, and a team member may have a particular expertise that especially enhances the written document, for example, extensive knowledge of the preferred language and structure of communications to particular audiences (e.g., policy makers, program managers, media representatives, different ethnic groups). Dividing the writing task among several persons can make it easier.

However, collaborative writing can result in a disjointed, incoherent document if the team does not undertake a specific strategy for working

together effectively. At least three approaches are possible (Berger, 1993). First, an evaluation team can produce a team draft in work sessions where group dynamics stimulate creativity. Second, as suggested above, the team can assign parts of the document to different members. One person or a smaller team then edits and revises the document. Third, one team member writes the first draft and the others critique it, submitting changes, additions, and deletions as they see fit. With any of these approaches, the team must take care to ensure that the final product has a consistent style, is logically presented, and does not have repetitions or omissions of important information. (See Figure 3.22 for a report checklist that can be used to delegate, coordinate, and monitor the progress of multiple authors to a report.)

■ **Allow sufficient time for writing several drafts, getting feedback, and proofreading.**

Once individual evaluators or evaluation teams have given their best effort to producing a written communication, it should still be considered a draft. Evaluators must allocate time for obtaining feedback, making changes to the document, and proofreading the final copy. Stakeholders should be asked to review the document for two reasons: First, to make the document more relevant to its intended audiences (i.e., by examining it for clarity, style, and choice of words); and second, to inform them of its contents and give them an opportunity to request revisions, particularly when evaluation findings will also be presented in verbal presentations or working sessions to these and other audiences.

Short Written Communications

Short communications like memos, e-mail, and postcards are vital tools for establishing and maintaining ongoing contact among evaluators, clients, and other stakeholders. Brief, sometimes frequent communications about the evaluation are useful for reaching a wide range of individuals and groups. They can elicit responses to evaluation activities and findings, and help establish rapport. Further, they provide a record of events, activities, and decisions about a program, its evaluation, or both. This record can also be the basis for more formal reports later on. Short written pieces can be used

- At the beginning, to communicate with stakeholders about an evaluation's purpose and activities.
- Throughout the evaluation process, to elicit feedback and discussion and to inform stakeholders of continuing activities and/or interim findings.
- At the end, to disseminate key findings, information on important issues, and/or next steps.

The focused content of short communications makes for easy reading and assimilation of information. Flexible formats can heighten visual attraction and attention through the use of color and interesting layouts with varied headings and graphics. Information clearly and succinctly presented in these ways is more likely to be remembered. Further, short communications can be sequenced so that they present limited, simplified information early in the evaluation and then build to longer, more complex communications (Macy, 1982). Combined with frequent phone contacts and discussions about their contents, memos, e-mail, and postcards can facilitate timely interaction with clients and stakeholders. The following sections discuss how each type of short written communication can be used during various stages of an evaluation.

Memos and E-mail

The most common short form of written communication is a memorandum, or memo for short. A memo conveys a select amount of information addressed to one or more readers in a consistent format. It tends to be crisp and brisk in tone, lacking the social conventions of a letter. Because of its brevity (from a paragraph or two to three or four pages), it is often used for frequent, ongoing communication among individuals, teams, programs, or organizations.

The format of a memo can vary according to individual needs or organizational style, but typically a memo has these components:

- Date it is written
- Names of the addressees
- Name of the sender(s)
- A "cc:" notation indicating the memo's carbon copy distribution to persons other than the addressees—often, colleagues of the sender, program staff or directors, funders, or other stakeholders in the evaluation process
- Subject line with a short phrase about the topic or purpose of the memo
- Text or contents
- An "encl:" notation indicating any enclosures or attachments

Also, tables and figures can be incorporated into the text of a memo to further facilitate audience comprehension and use of the evaluation information.

The familiarity of this format and its condensed length make memos easy to reproduce and distribute. Most memos are now sent via e-mail, either in the text of the e-mail or as an e-mail attachment, but can also be faxed or mailed. By using communication mediums like memos and e-mail, you can

capitalize on routine communication channels and facilitate integration of the evaluation with the ongoing work of the organization. You can use short written communications to

- Update audiences about the progress of the evaluation, and/or invite them to participate in upcoming evaluation activities.
- Inform about and request support for various evaluation activities. (See Figure 3.13, e-mail flyer; to view this figure in color, go to http://www .sagepub.com/escr.)
- Recap or follow up on decisions or points made during a telephone or face-to-face meeting.
- Solicit feedback on the evaluation plan, data collection instruments, particular findings, or a draft of the evaluation report.
- Communicate a summary of the evaluation's findings and recommendations.
- Communicate about how the evaluation's recommendations will be used and/or how an evaluation's recommendations are being implemented.
- Orient recipients on how to use, interpret, and/or work with an evaluation document that is sent with the memo or e-mail (see Figure 3.14).

Guidelines for Using E-mail

- Make sure you have recipients' current e-mail addresses. Consider setting up a group contact list, and keep it updated.
- Try to keep what you say to one computer screen page—approximately 25 lines of text. Consider sending lengthier documents as attachments.
- Use fairly terse prose—but don't be too blunt. Use constructive and respectful language and avoid any semblance of blaming or hostility.
- Review your e-mails before sending them. Read the e-mail from the perspective of the recipient.
- If you want to emphasize certain words or phrases, use HTML formatting (color, bold, italics, etc.), or use various forms of punctuation with regular type. Use all capital letters sparingly, as they connote that you are shouting.
- Add a subject line that pertains to the e-mail body to get people in the right frame of mind to open and read your message.
- Carefully consider which stakeholders should be copied on the e-mail message.
- Keep a log of the e-mails you send to remind you of what communication has taken place.

- If the message is particularly urgent or is time-sensitive, consider labeling it as a "high priority" (if that option is available with your e-mail software). Be careful not to overuse this feature, though.
- Request a return receipt to be notified when the recipient has received your message. (Note that recipients' software must support this feature and the recipient has to have enabled it.)
- Consider including a disclaimer at the bottom of all e-mail messages to provide some protection against misuse of your e-mails.
- Install and frequently update the latest virus protection software on your computer.

In addition, e-mail communications are particularly well suited for

- Asking primary stakeholders questions as they arise during the evaluation.
- Informing stakeholders that the evaluation has been completed.
- Transmitting draft and final versions of evaluation documents or information about where they may find the evaluation's results (see Figure 3.15).

—Come Take a Seat at the Table—

We need your
input!

Focus Group Reminder:

*What challenges and successes
have you experienced with
the new reading curriculum?*

3:30 – 4:30 pm

Elkview Elementary School Library

Refreshments Served
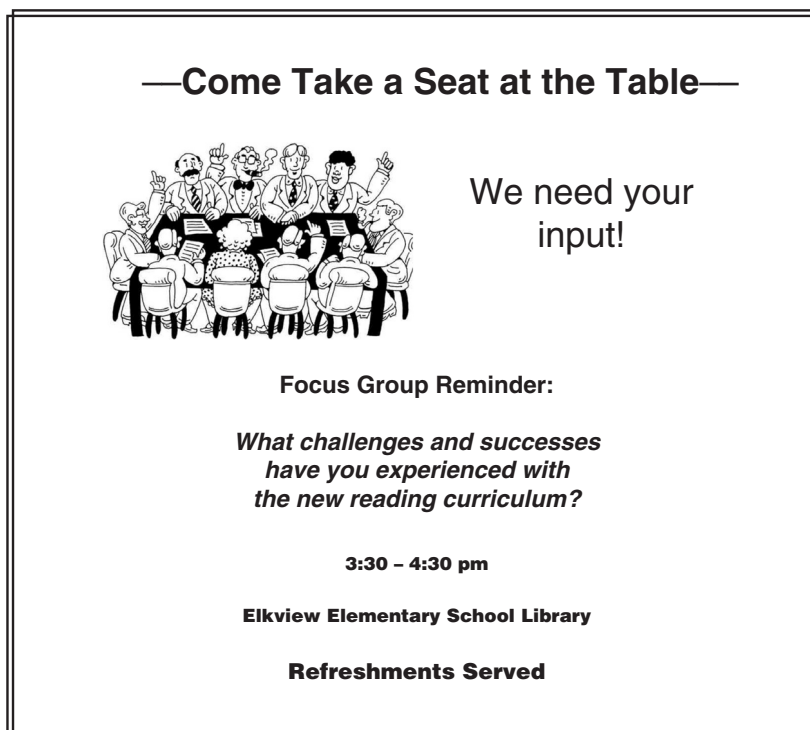
Figure 3.13   Example of E-mail in Flyer Format to Announce/Remind
                About Focus Group

Memo

Research, Evaluation, and Organizational Learning

To:	Coaches, John, Christine
From:	Research, Evaluation, & Organizational Learning (Cindy, Ann, Jason)
CC:	George, Jerry, Kim
Date:	9/17/04
Re:	03–04 Evaluation Findings

Here are two versions of the 03-04 evaluation findings to be read in preparation for the coaches' meeting on 9/19/04.

For each school there is a separate narrative report.

The 11 × 17 sheets summarize findings across all of the schools, and present an initial set of questions to consider in terms of implications.

Please read the report for your school, and then review the large sheets to see the findings on the other schools.

As a final step in preparation for the meeting, review the implication questions that are presented. These are not necessarily exhaustive. What other questions come to mind?

Don't hesitate to call or e-mail us if you have questions in the meantime.

Figure 3.14   Cover Memo Accompanying Evaluation Findings and Instructing
Recipients How to Prepare for Meeting to Discuss Implications

Using e-mail to communicate and report an evaluation's activities, progress, and/or findings has the following advantages:

- By saving paper and distribution expenses, e-mail is an inexpensive way to get information out to a large number of people in a timely way.
- E-mails are short, take little time to write, and can keep stakeholders well informed and involved in the evaluation.
- The body of an e-mail can be formatted as a memo; it can also contain pictures and be formatted using color and graphics (see Figure 3.13).
- Recipients can read e-mail at their own convenience.
- E-mails can be printed out and/or stored electronically for future reference.

From: Department Director
Sent: Tuesday, November 4, 2004 8:52 AM
Subject: Final Evaluation Report

To all the fine folks in the Corporate Education, Development, and Training Department and others who participated in our evaluation effort:
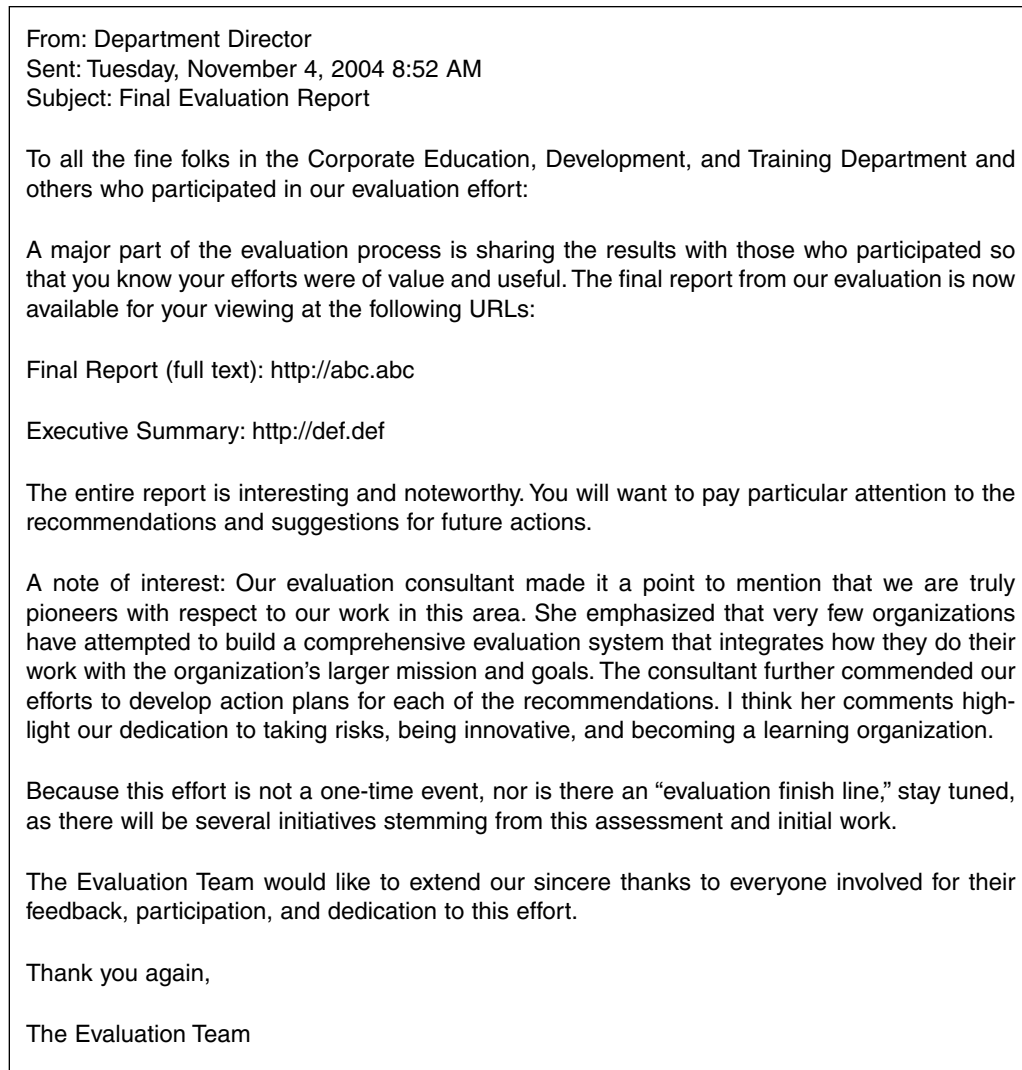
A major part of the evaluation process is sharing the results with those who participated so that you know your efforts were of value and useful. The final report from our evaluation is now available for your viewing at the following URLs:

Final Report (full text): http://abc.abc

Executive Summary: http://def.def

The entire report is interesting and noteworthy. You will want to pay particular attention to the recommendations and suggestions for future actions.

A note of interest: Our evaluation consultant made it a point to mention that we are truly pioneers with respect to our work in this area. She emphasized that very few organizations have attempted to build a comprehensive evaluation system that integrates how they do their work with the organization's larger mission and goals. The consultant further commended our efforts to develop action plans for each of the recommendations. I think her comments highlight our dedication to taking risks, being innovative, and becoming a learning organization.

Because this effort is not a one-time event, nor is there an "evaluation finish line," stay tuned, as there will be several initiatives stemming from this assessment and initial work.

The Evaluation Team would like to extend our sincere thanks to everyone involved for their feedback, participation, and dedication to this effort.

Thank you again,

The Evaluation Team

Figure 3.15   Example of E-mail Used to Communicate Appreciation, Location of Final Report, and Next Steps After an Evaluation Has Been Completed

Implementation Tips for Memos and E-mail

■ **Before deciding to use e-mail, determine stakeholders' and clients' e-mail access.**

Some organizations may not have e-mail; people in various positions within an organization often do not have access to computers; and in many parts of the world, e-mail is either unavailable or expensive. And even if evaluation stakeholders have e-mail access, it does not necessarily mean

that they use it. Many people, especially those who are not accessing e-mail in a work environment, do not read e-mail every day and therefore might not see your message in time for it to be useful. Consider the audience to whom you are sending e-mail messages and determine the frequency with which they are likely to check their e-mail. During first contacts with evaluation stakeholders, ask about their use of e-mail and its suitability as a means of communication. If necessary, use alternative methods such as telephone or fax.

■ **Determine whether to send a memo within the text of an e-mail, as an e-mail attachment, or on hard copy.**

As mentioned earlier, the text of an e-mail can be formatted to look like a typical memo. Alternatively you can create a memo, save it in a file, and then attach it to an e-mail. You can also fax a memo, and send it via the postal service or an organization's internal mail system. Although there are no absolutely clear guidelines about which method to use, there are some things to consider. The more formal or significant (in content) a memo is, the more likely you may choose to send it as an e-mail attachment or in a hard copy form. Routine communications about evaluation processes and activities are typically communicated in the text of e-mails.

E-mail attachments require a little more effort from recipients, who must open them up and print them out. This, however, yields a hard copy of the memo and a traditional, formal record of it. The memo can be saved on recipients' computers for future reference; but this also means that it can easily be altered. For highly sensitive information or in politically charged situations, you may choose to send your memo via fax or mail.

Sometimes you will write memos to accompany evaluation documents, and both can be sent via e-mail if the documents can easily be opened and printed by the recipients, although some documents are best transmitted via mail (e.g., those that are bound, have special formatting that may be lost, are formatted on paper larger than 8.5×11 inches, or are color coded).

■ **Beware of how easy it is to use memos and e-mail.**

When using memos and e-mail to communicate and report an evaluation's process and findings, be sure to give your reader at least a brief context. A challenge with using short communications for evaluation purposes is that messages can lack information about the context in which to interpret the message. In a conversation, there is at least some minimum of shared context. For example, you might be in the same physical location. Even on the phone there is the commonality of time.

Carefully consider which stakeholders should be copied on your memos and e-mails. Think about which stakeholders should be aware of the information you are communicating, and any implications or consequences. It is easy to inadvertently copy someone you did not intend to, and it is also easy to forget to copy those you did.

When writing memos and e-mail messages, remember to think about how your message will be heard. Since memos and e-mails are less formal than a letter, it is especially important to write with a professional tone. These are one-way communications, and as a result, there is a greater chance for misunderstandings and misinterpretations.

Remember that e-mails and files attached to them constitute legal documents, and can be used in a court of law. Do not say anything in e-mail that you would not want retrieved. Every word may be scrutinized as if it were a formal written document. Though messages may appear to have been deleted from a computer, they can remain in the system's backup files. Therefore, try not to use e-mail to communicate sensitive or emotional topics if you are concerned with how a message might be received and used.

■ **To the extent possible, follow up on memos and e-mail you send.**

The popularity of memos and e-mail can be a disadvantage. Either can get little attention if they are among many that stakeholders receive. And, without some further contact, you may never know if recipients received them. Although the postal system tends to be reliable and you can know if a fax was transmitted successfully, within large organizations these communications may not ultimately make it to the intended recipient. The service of most e-mail systems is interrupted at one time or another. Although dependent on the e-mail software both you and your recipients are using, requesting a "return receipt" for e-mails sent can be helpful. You can also request in the text of your e-mail that the recipients let you know they have received it successfully.

■ **Consider including a disclaimer at the bottom of all e-mail messages.**

It is possible for e-mail messages to be modified by receivers who might then send them on to others. If you are concerned about a highly political or controversial evaluation, you may want to consider communicating and reporting using methods that protect the content from being altered. Another option for some level of protection is to include a disclaimer at the bottom of all your e-mail messages. As shown in Figure 3.16, disclaimers can warn recipients about receiving the e-mail in error, use of the e-mail, transmission of viruses, and/or liability for errors and omissions.

If you received this e-mail in error, please notify the sender by e-mail at the above e-mail address immediately. This e-mail transmission may contain confidential information for the exclusive use of the individual(s) or entity to whom it is intended, even if addressed incorrectly. Please delete it from your files if you are not the intended recipient. Thank you for your cooperation.

The information, materials, or attachments embodied in this e-mail are considered confidential. Recipients understand that this correspondence is privileged and its contents should be protected. Aside from the intended recipients, it is strictly forbidden to copy, print, discuss, reproduce, forward, or distribute the contents of this e-mail without permission.

If you have received this e-mail in error, please immediately delete it, notify the sender, and understand you are bound to keep the contents confidential.

This message contains confidential information and is intended only for the individual named. If you are not the named addressee you should not disseminate, distribute, or copy this e-mail. Please notify the sender immediately by e-mail if you have received this e-mail by mistake and delete this e-mail from your system. If you are not the intended recipient, you are notified that disclosing, copying, distributing, or taking any action in reliance on the contents of this information is strictly prohibited.

E-mail transmission cannot be guaranteed to be secure or error-free, as information could be intercepted, corrupted, lost, destroyed, arrive late or incomplete, or contain viruses. The sender therefore does not accept liability for any errors or omissions in the contents of this message that arise as a result of e-mail transmission. If verification is required please request a hard-copy version.

Figure 3.16   Examples of E-mail Disclaimer Statements

CAUTIONS FOR MEMOS AND E-MAIL

■ **Despite your best efforts, short communications can be misinterpreted.**

As with any other written communication that does not include audio or visual contact, there is still the possibility that e-mail messages can be misinterpreted, leading to misunderstandings, as well as a lack of response or follow-up.

> ■ **Recipients of your e-mail might not read messages from those they do not know, or whose e-mail addresses they do not recognize.**
>
> Given the proliferation of junk e-mails, also known as "spam," and e-mail viruses, this is a legitimate concern for evaluators wishing to use e-mail as a communicating and reporting strategy. If your address or name is not familiar, recipients may delete your e-mail message without reading it. Also, in fear of viruses, some e-mail users decline to open attachments, regardless of who has sent them.

Postcards

A postcard is a quarter-page to half-page document on heavy paper most often sent through traditional mail channels, but may also be attached to an e-mail. As with a memo, it conveys a limited amount of information in a confined length. Dentists, doctors, and other health practitioners routinely use postcards to remind clients of upcoming appointments. Retailers use postcards to inform the public of sales events. Invitations to events hosted by all types of organizations are frequently sent on postcards. They are a convenient, inexpensive, and sometimes catchy way of soliciting participation and maintaining contact. The novelty of receiving a postcard related to an evaluation may catch stakeholders' attention and make the information it conveys more memorable. A color postcard, possibly including graphics, can be inviting to read—especially in the midst of the multitude of e-mails that many audiences receive daily. Also, audiences may associate the format of the postcard with quick, concise communication, requiring little effort for a response (Parker, 1992). The following implementation tips describe three uses of postcards for evaluation communications.

Implementation Tips for Postcards

■ **Use postcards to maintain contact with stakeholders and build interest in the evaluation.**

Figure 3.17 shows a series of six postcards used by an evaluation team over six months. These monthly postcard alerts were designed to keep stakeholders engaged, build anticipation for the full report, and encourage evaluative thinking.

January: Postcard sent after initial evaluation workshop involving key stakeholders:

> *The standards for the profession call for evaluations to be judged by **their utility, feasibility, propriety**, and **accuracy**.*

February: Postcard describing the "evaluation version of the Genesis story":

> *In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.*
>
> *And God saw everything that he made. "Behold," God said, "it is very good." And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.*
>
> *And on the seventh day God rested from all His work. His archangel came then unto Him asking, "God, how do you know that what you have created is 'very good'? What are your criteria? On what data do you base your judgment? Just exactly what results were you expecting to attain? And aren't you a little close to the situation to make a fair and unbiased evaluation?"*
>
> *God thought about these questions all that day and His rest was greatly disturbed. On the eighth day God said, "Lucifer, go to hell."*
>
> *Thus was evaluation born in a blaze of glory . . . .* (Utilization-Focused Evaluation, Patton)

March: Postcard providing excerpts from interview data collection:

> *Striving for balance.*
>
> *Interviews are underway; perspectives vary. Here are two examples:*
>
> *"I look forward to attending the program. The sessions are always interesting and I get so much out of it every time."*
>
> *"One word—boring. It's just so boring."*

April: Postcard providing update on survey data collection:

> *The survey is now completed—with a 79% response rate.*
>
> - *39% rated the program very helpful*
> - *42% somewhat helpful*
> - *11% not too helpful*
> - * 8% not at all helpful*
>
> *The full analysis will show what categories of participants found the program more or less helpful—and why they rated it as they did.*

May: Postcard reporting on themes emerging from the data analysis:

> *A major theme in the analysis is **responsiveness**.*
>
> *Sample quotes:*
>
> - *"From the beginning the staff have been very open to feedback about how to improve things and relate to our concerns."*
> - *"Our questions are taken seriously. The staff keep telling us to let them know what we want and they really do respond."*
> - *"I think the staff get off track by always trying to do what people say they want. They're staff. They should know what we need to learn."*
>
> *The full report will present eight major themes from the interviews and relate those results to the survey data.*

Figure 3.17   Series of Monthly Postcard Updates

SOURCE: Used with permission of Michael Patton.

June: Postcard alerting clients about upcoming evaluation meeting and draft report dissemination:

In two weeks you'll get a draft copy of the report in preparation for our meeting together to review results on June 28.

As you read, keep in mind the evaluation's utility standard:

An evaluation should serve the practical information needs of intended users.

You are the primary intended users. We'll need your help in interpreting the findings and generating useful recommendations.

Figure 3.17 *(Continued)*

◼ **Use postcards to invite stakeholders to evaluation meetings or events, and/or remind them of data collection or other upcoming activities.**

Figure 3.18 shows the front and back of a postcard used to remind evaluation participants to return a survey. It contains graphics to add interest and could be printed in color or on colored paper to attract attention. Note that the e-mail shown in Figure 3.13 could also be sent as a postcard.

◼ **Use postcards to solicit reactions to preliminary findings.**

Requests for reactions to preliminary data or findings can be communicated using a postcard during the evaluation's data collection and/or analysis phases. Doing so can (1) establish stakeholder involvement in drawing conclusions and making recommendations and (2) help detect information that might be controversial, incomplete, or inconsistent.

One strategy is to communicate a key finding, direct quote, or result from preliminary analyses using a postcard like the one shown in Figure 3.19. Here stakeholders are asked to record their reactions on the postcard and then return it using the address label provided. Using this method, you can (1) gain a better understanding of various stakeholders' perspectives, including the meaning and importance they associate with the issue or finding; and (2) facilitate their involvement by providing data or information that is palatable because of its clarity and brevity.

Be aware, though, that a postcard will be viewed (intentionally or unintentionally) by a number of persons other than its recipient, if it is distributed through the regular mail or an organization's internal mail system. For soliciting feedback on controversial or confidential information, distributing the postcards in an envelope or in an e-mail text is a better choice.
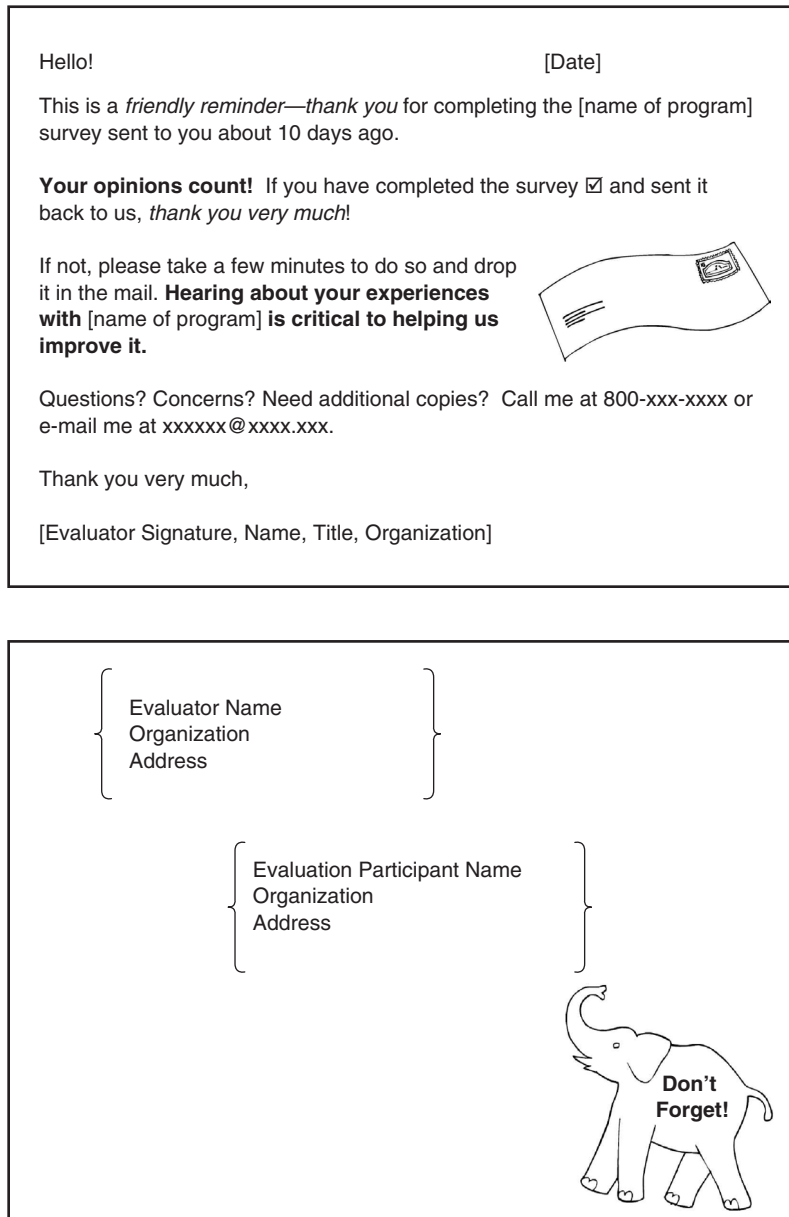
Hello!   [Date]

This is a *friendly reminder—thank you* for completing the [name of program]
survey sent to you about 10 days ago.

Your opinions count! If you have completed the survey ☑ and sent it
back to us, *thank you very much*!

If not, please take a few minutes to do so and drop
it in the mail. **Hearing about your experiences
with** [name of program] **is critical to helping us
improve it.**

Questions? Concerns? Need additional copies? Call me at 800-xxx-xxxx or
e-mail me at xxxxxx@xxxx.xxx.

Thank you very much,

[Evaluator Signature, Name, Title, Organization]

Evaluator Name
Organization
Address

Evaluation Participant Name
Organization
Address

**Don't
Forget!**

Figure 3.18   Back and Front of Example Postcard Reminder to Return Survey

Interim Reports

Interim reports present partial evaluation findings. They are typically short
reports, but can be of considerable size in the case of multiyear, multisite,
and/or very comprehensive evaluations. They are almost always produced in

[Date]

Dear [Stakeholder/Evaluation Participant Name]:

Progress on the evaluation is going well! As you are aware, currently we are interviewing staff in _____ about _____.

One of the themes that is emerging from the interviews is the notion that

_____

One person put it this way: "_____

_____."

Any thoughts, reactions, or comments on this? Please write in the space below. Slip this postcard into an envelope, and use the label attached below to send it back to me.
Your reaction:

_____

_____

_____

Thanks for your continued interest and cooperation!

[*Evaluator Signature*]

[Evaluator Name]
[Evaluation Title]

[Removable Return Label With Evaluator Name/Address]

P.S. To maintain the anonymity of your response, peel the address label off the back of this postcard.

Figure 3.19   Example of Postcard for Soliciting Stakeholder Feedback on Emerging Findings

anticipation of a more comprehensive report to be made available later. Further, they are typically planned at the outset of the evaluation. The scheduling of interim reports is usually dictated by

- The life cycle of the program
- When certain data collection activities can and will be completed
- Specific decision-making needs of clients and stakeholders

Although interim findings, conclusions, interpretations, and/or recommendations can be presented in short communication formats, some clients and stakeholders will expect a more formal report at this time. In these cases, an interim report can look much like a comprehensive final report, fully addressing the program's context and the evaluation's background and methodology.

Much of the information in the section that follows on final reports is relevant to formal, lengthy interim reports.

Regardless of their format, interim reports are important because they help integrate evaluation activities and findings with key stages in the life of a program or organization. Interim reports often provide findings on program implementation, and can alert clients and stakeholders to important issues requiring their attention. Without successful implementation, it is unreasonable to expect many of an intervention's intended outcomes to occur. And increasingly, funders who typically focused primarily on outcomes are recognizing the importance of understanding implementation issues and progress early in a program's life cycle.

Implementation Tips for Interim Reports

■ **Begin planning for interim reports at the outset of the evaluation to meet early reporting deadlines.**

Every effort should be made to deliver interim reports on time. The life cycle of a program is likely to be such that, for evaluation findings to be most useful, they must be available at a particular time. Typically, these factors are taken into consideration when schedules for interim reports are established. Nonetheless, the scheduled date for an evaluation's first interim report may be relatively soon after the evaluation has begun. Without advance planning, you could easily miss this date.

■ **Consider an informal presentation of findings rather than a formal interim report.**

Producing formal written reports can take more time than is available, if your evaluation is going to meet client and stakeholder needs for interim findings. Consider presenting quantitative findings in tables and graphs and qualitative findings in a bulleted format, rather than taking the time to develop a formal report. This can be especially appropriate for internal evaluations, and/or when there is little risk of misinterpretation. Presenting these findings in a working session to help clients and stakeholders understand and interpret the findings can be especially effective. Case Example 3.2 describes an internal evaluation where implementation findings were presented via a working session as soon as they had been summarized into tables and bulleted lists.

CASE EXAMPLE 3.2

"Just-in-Time" Reporting of Interim Findings

The internal evaluation group of a nonprofit educational agency was conducting an implementation and outcome evaluation of an educational reform initiative in six urban elementary schools. Data collection included principal interviews conducted in November and April, mid- and year-end teacher surveys, and ongoing staff developer reports of teacher progress with classroom implementation. Outcome findings would be based on spring-to-spring comparisons of student achievement using a time series design. These data would not be available until the early fall of the subsequent school year.

Among other responsibilities, three evaluation staff members were assigned to this project. It was crucial for program staff to get a sense of implementation progress during the year so that adjustments and/or additional support could be provided to the schools. On the other hand, the evaluation staff would not have been able to produce a formal, comprehensive interim report in time for the findings to meet this need. Alternatively, in late January they produced tables summarizing the responses to the midyear teacher implementation survey, an outline of staff development provided to date, and bulleted lists summarizing principals' and staff developers' assessments of implementation progress.

Program staff and grade-level teacher representatives had been involved in the design and some of the data collection, and did not require much explanation of the instruments or presentation of the data. The summary documents were delivered via an e-mail attachment approximately one week before the working session to discuss them was to occur. During that week the evaluators reviewed the findings and developed a tentative list of conclusions. At the working session, the findings were briefly reviewed to check for understanding within the group. Then, the evaluators presented their tentative list of conclusions, invited discussion, and asked the group to revise the list as appropriate. Once consensus was reached around conclusions for each aspect of implementation, the group discussed implications of the findings and developed a set of actions to be taken. The result was an action plan with its contents prioritized in terms of need for immediate, short-term, or longer-term attention.

■ **Use a style and format for the interim report that make its contents easy to assimilate.**

The Joint Committee's (1994) *The Program Evaluation Standards* offers this guideline in support of the standard on report clarity: "Keep the presentation of reports as brief as possible, simple and direct, and focused upon addressing the evaluation questions" (p. 49). We feel this guideline is particularly applicable to interim reports. They should be presented in a style and format that maximize the likelihood that clients and stakeholders will read and assimilate their contents. Figure 3.20 shows a five-page interim report

from the U.S. Department of Education. It is formatted with wide margins and two levels of headings to guide readers. Color is used to set off the title and subtitle of the report, as well as the first letter of each major heading. The text includes bulleted lists. Notice that the first page presents a summary of findings. The next several pages present more detail. The final page fully describes the evaluation and refers the reader to additional reports. (To see this figure in color, go to http://www.sagepub.com/escr.)

The National Evaluation of Upward Bound:

Summary of First-year Impacts and Program Operations (1997)

The Upward Bound program is intended to fill an important need: helping disadvantaged high school students realize the dream of a college education. An ongoing evaluation of the Upward Bound program, the largest of the federally funded TRIO programs, is yielding important new information about the program's effectiveness, showing that it affects students early on, and in positive ways.

The federal government spent $172 million on Upward Bound in 1996. Most students enter Upward Bound when they are in the ninth or tenth grade of high school. Once enrolled, students participate in a multiyear program of weekly activities during the school year and an intensive summer program that simulates college. In 1996, 45,000 students across the U.S. participated in the program, through projects offered by 601 grantees. The average federal cost per student was $3,800.

The U.S. Department of Education asked Mathematica Policy Research to evaluate Upward Bound's effectiveness. Mathematica was assisted by its subcontractors, Educational Testing Service, Westat, and Decision Information Resources. This publication summarizes Mathematica's findings on the program's short-term impacts on students and the academic content of its services. All impacts reported are statistically significant. In October 1997, information about longer-term impacts on students will be available.

Findings in Brief

- Two impacts emerge early on from Upward Bound. First, students who participate in the program expect to complete more schooling than similar students who do not. Second, the program has a positive impact on the number of academic courses participants take during high school.

- The students who benefit most initially are those with lower academic expectations.

- When impacts are examined by racial/ethnic groups, Hispanic students benefit the most from Upward Bound.

- The program shows no impact in the first year on participants' high school grades.

Figure 3.20 Example of Interim Report

- Many students leave the program in the first year.

- Most Upward Bound projects focus on providing a rich and challenging academic program.

A Closer Look at Specific Findings

Expectations About Continuing in School

During the first year that students participate, Upward Bound bolsters the expectations for continued schooling that they and their parents hold.

- Participants expected to complete almost 0.25 more years of school on average than nonparticipants. Both groups of students typically experienced some decline in educational expectations between the time of application to the program and the follow-up survey. The decline, however, was much larger for the control group.

- According to participants, their parents expected them to complete about 0.3 more years of schooling than did parents of children in the control group. The expectations of participants' parents changed little; however, the expectations of control group parents declined substantially.

Credits Earned

Upward Bound increases the number of high school academic credits students earn during the first year of participation.

- Participants earned about one credit (Carnegie unit) more than nonparticipants. This impact is quite large when compared with the experiences of a typical high school student, who each year is expected to complete about five academic and/or elective credits.

- Participants earned substantially more credits in science, math, English, foreign languages, and social studies than nonparticipants.

- Participants also earned more credits than nonparticipants in vocational education and remedial math courses.

Students Who Benefit Most

Before participating in Upward Bound, almost three-quarters of applicants who are eligible for the program expect to complete at least a four-year college degree. But those who benefit most from Upward Bound are those who do not expect to complete a four-year college degree.

- Parents' educational expectations for their children increased when their children started Upward Bound with lower expectations. For example, Upward Bound increased fathers' expectations by 1.2 years for these participants.

- In contrast, parents of children with higher initial expectations for continued schooling neither increased nor decreased their expectations.

In terms of academic preparation, Upward Bound has a large positive impact on the high school credits that students with lower expectations earn in math, English, and social studies.

Figure 3.20 *(Continued)*

- Participants with lower educational expectations gained almost 0.6 more math credits than their counterparts in the control group; the corresponding figure for students with higher expectations was 0.1 credit.

- Participation in Upward Bound also led to an increase of about 0.8 credits in English and social studies for students with lower expectations and less than 0.1 credit for those with higher expectations.

- Across all academic subjects, Upward Bound increased the number of credits earned by 3.1 for participants with lower expectations and by 0.5 credits for those with higher expectations.

Course taking for the three largest racial/ethnic groups in Upward Bound follows a consistent pattern: Hispanic students routinely experience larger gains from participation than either African American or white students.

- Hispanic students gained more than two credits; African American and white students gained less than 0.5 credits.

- Larger gains for Hispanics are apparent in several subjects: math, English, foreign languages, social studies, and vocational education.

First-Year Program Dropouts

Although Upward Bound has a substantial effect on educational expectations and course taking, the effect could be even larger if more students stayed in the program. Even in the first year, participants who leave Upward Bound early, for example, do not earn as many credits in high school as those who remain. Despite the value that comes from staying, many students do choose to leave Upward Bound in the first year. Furthermore, attrition from Upward Bound may be quite substantial by the time a group of entering students finishes high school.

- About 32% of those who entered Upward Bound before summer 1993 left by the end of the 1993–1994 academic year.

- Projections based on the experience of all students in the study suggest that 37% of those who participate will leave within the first 12 months.

- The program's dropout rate is very likely to increase at the end of the junior year, when project staff have reported that students are most likely to leave Upward Bound for summer and after-school jobs.

The Academic Challenge of Upward Bound

Most Upward Bound projects offer programs that emphasize academic preparation for college. Although an evaluation conducted in the 1970s by Research Triangle Institute prompted concern that Upward Bound projects did not devote enough time to academic instruction, recent evidence counters this view. The academic intensity of projects is evident from three perspectives:

- Number of Courses Offered. Fifty percent of the Upward Bound projects offer more than 17 academic courses in the summer and more than 10 academic courses during

Figure 3.20 *(Continued)*

the regular school year. These courses are in addition to the tutoring, academic counseling, study skills, and SAT/ACT test preparation courses that almost all projects provide.

- Nature and Content of Courses. More than two-thirds of the projects focus on instruction that is not remedial. These projects either support the curricular content in the college preparatory program of the high school, or they adopt an enrichment focus that teaches content the schools are unlikely to teach. Most projects offer courses that reflect a traditional precollege preparatory curriculum and a wide range of subjects.

- Course Requirements. Eighty percent of the projects require students to complete at least six courses in the Upward Bound program. The majority prescribe the set of courses that must be taken. Projects that specify courses fall into two groups. The first, which represents one-third of all projects, emphasizes completing a "foundational" curriculum comprising reading, writing, algebra I and II, and geometry. The second, which represents a slightly larger fraction of projects, has a math/science orientation with requirements for precalculus, calculus, and science courses in addition to the foundational requirements.

- Intensity of Contact With Students. Among first-year participants, the typical number of academic sessions attended was 179, and the typical number of non-academic (counseling, SAT prep, skill development, etc.) sessions attended was 95. Two-thirds of these sessions took place during the summer and the rest took place during the academic year.

Summing Up

The short-term impacts of Upward Bound, even though they are not evident for every kind of outcome, are both impressive and important. For just one year of involvement, Upward Bound offers real benefits to students. It exposes them to academically challenging courses in addition to those they take in high school. It results in participants and their parents holding higher expectations about future education. It leads to participants' earning more academic credits in high school. Moreover, Upward Bound is particularly beneficial for students who initially expect to complete fewer years of education and who come from Hispanic origins.

While these results are promising, they give only a partial view of how well Upward Bound works. Will the initial results endure and become larger as participants graduate from high school and face the challenge of college? Will the grades of participants and other outcomes that have yet to show impacts change as a result of students' involvement in the program? Answers to these questions will come as future reports about long-term program impacts are produced by the national evaluation.

About The Study

The national evaluation of Upward Bound is a six-year, longitudinal study commissioned by the Planning and Evaluation Service of the U.S. Department of Education. The evaluation incorporates data from many sources, including nationally representative samples of regular Upward Bound grantees and their target schools, and a nationally representative sample of students who applied to the program between 1992 and 1994 and were randomly

Figure 3.20 *(Continued)*

assigned either to Upward Bound or to a control group. Additional data were collected through field visits to a representative sample of 20 Upward Bound projects in the spring and the summer of 1993.

Because of the study design, findings on the impact of Upward Bound are generalizable to all Upward Bound projects hosted by two- and four-year colleges. The design uses a nationally representative sample of 67 Upward Bound grantees at two- and four-year colleges. Of students who were eligible applicants to these 67 projects, the evaluation randomly assigned 1,524 to Upward Bound and 1,320 to a control group. Short-term impacts are based on comparing students in the two groups across a range of measures, including high school grades and course taking, attitudes and educational expectations, misbehavior in school, and parental involvement. All students completed an initial survey form before they were randomly assigned to Upward Bound or the control group; more than 97% responded to a follow-up survey in 1994. Students' high school transcripts also were collected in 1994.

The survey of Upward Bound grantees collected detailed information about project operations and staffing for the 1992–1993 year. Questionnaires were mailed to a nationally representative sample of 244 projects, and 92% of the questionnaires were returned. The survey of target schools collected information from principals and Upward Bound liaisons in the schools (generally school guidance counselors) on a variety of topics, including the educational climate, availability of precollege programs in the school, contacts with Upward Bound, and perceptions of program effectiveness. Target school questionnaires went to a sample of 754 middle schools and high schools; 96% of these schools responded.

Reports From the National Evaluation of Upward Bound

Two major reports describing the Upward Bound program and its short-term impacts are available:

- Moore, Mary T. *A 1990's View of Upward Bound: Programs Offered, Students Served, and Operational Issues.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Planning and Evaluation Service, 1996.

- Myers, David E. and Allen Schirm. *The Short-Term Impacts of Upward Bound: An Interim Report.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Planning and Evaluation Service, 1996.

Figure 3.20 *(Continued)*

■ **Emphasize the provisional nature of interim findings to stakeholders and other audiences.**

Although formal interim reports can be critical to the usefulness of an evaluation, they can also effect great damage if interpreted inappropriately. The danger is that incomplete findings will be taken as being conclusive. It is a good idea to fully describe at the beginning of the report: (1) which data collection activities are being reported on; (2) the other data collection activities that are part of the evaluation; (3) when the final evaluation results will be

available; and (4) any cautions that readers should heed in interpreting the findings.

■ **Provide drafts of formal interim reports for review by stakeholders and other audiences.**

Time should be allocated for clients and stakeholders to review the drafts of formal interim reports for the same reasons that drafts of final reports are typically reviewed. Interim reports can carry considerable weight in clients' decision making and can influence stakeholders. Primary stakeholders should be given the opportunity to respond to them before they are released. The reactions of clients and stakeholders to drafts contribute to interim reports' relevance and usefulness.

CAUTION FOR INTERIM REPORTS

■ **Despite your best efforts, information in interim reports can be interpreted inappropriately.**

Even if you have gone to great lengths to make sure that clients and stakeholders understand the preliminary nature of interim reports, danger of misuse still exists—particularly in the case of formal, written reports delivered without an opportunity for discussion with stakeholders. Once conclusions, interpretations, and/or recommendations have been made and "put in print," it is possible for readers to interpret them as conclusive. These readers may not be part of a client or primary stakeholder group who has been in communication with those more familiar with the evaluation—the evaluator or other stakeholders. While it is critical that readers understand the bases for interim reports, they may skip over or disregard the information that explains any limitations.

Final Reports

Comprehensive final reports are the most commonly used form of reporting by evaluators (Torres et al, 1997). The framework for these reports is found in the reporting traditions of basic social science research. This approach mandates formal, thorough treatments of a study's rationale, design, methodology, results, and implications. The objective is to provide sufficient documentation for readers to draw alternative conclusions and/or replicate the research. (See Figure 3.21 for the typical sections and contents of comprehensive written evaluation reports.)

The need for comprehensiveness in evaluation reporting is reflected in the Joint Committee's (1994) fifth Utility Standard, which calls for evaluation reports to "clearly describe the program being evaluated, including its context, and the purposes, procedures, and findings of the evaluation so that essential information is provided and easily understood" (p. 49). The intent here is not so much for others to be able to replicate the evaluation study but rather for them to use its findings—something best done when clients understand how the evaluation was conducted. Yet, recognizing our roots in social science research traditions, the Joint Committee cautions against "overemphasizing methodology at the expense of findings" (p. 50). Evaluators' most long-standing concern about the lack of use of their work has to do with the dust-gathering qualities of unread final reports.

Indeed, typical expectations dictate that evaluators provide lengthy, comprehensive evaluation reports that are time consuming to produce. Not surprisingly, the most frequently cited impediment to success in communicating and reporting is insufficient time (Torres et al., 1997). Further, it is unclear that such reports provide the most cost-effective means for communicating evaluation findings in ways most useful to stakeholders (Alkin, 1990). Written reports serve important archival purposes, including accountability needs, but they are quite impotent if change and improvement are the expectation. Well-informed talk is a more powerful means by which to report good and bad findings and to actively engage stakeholders in the shared commitment to better programs (Mathison, 1994, p. 303).

Despite these concerns, there are times when formal, comprehensive evaluation reports are required and appropriate. Program funders and/or policy makers most often expect such documentation. Case Example 3.3 describes one federal grant program's work with grantees to improve the content of their reports.
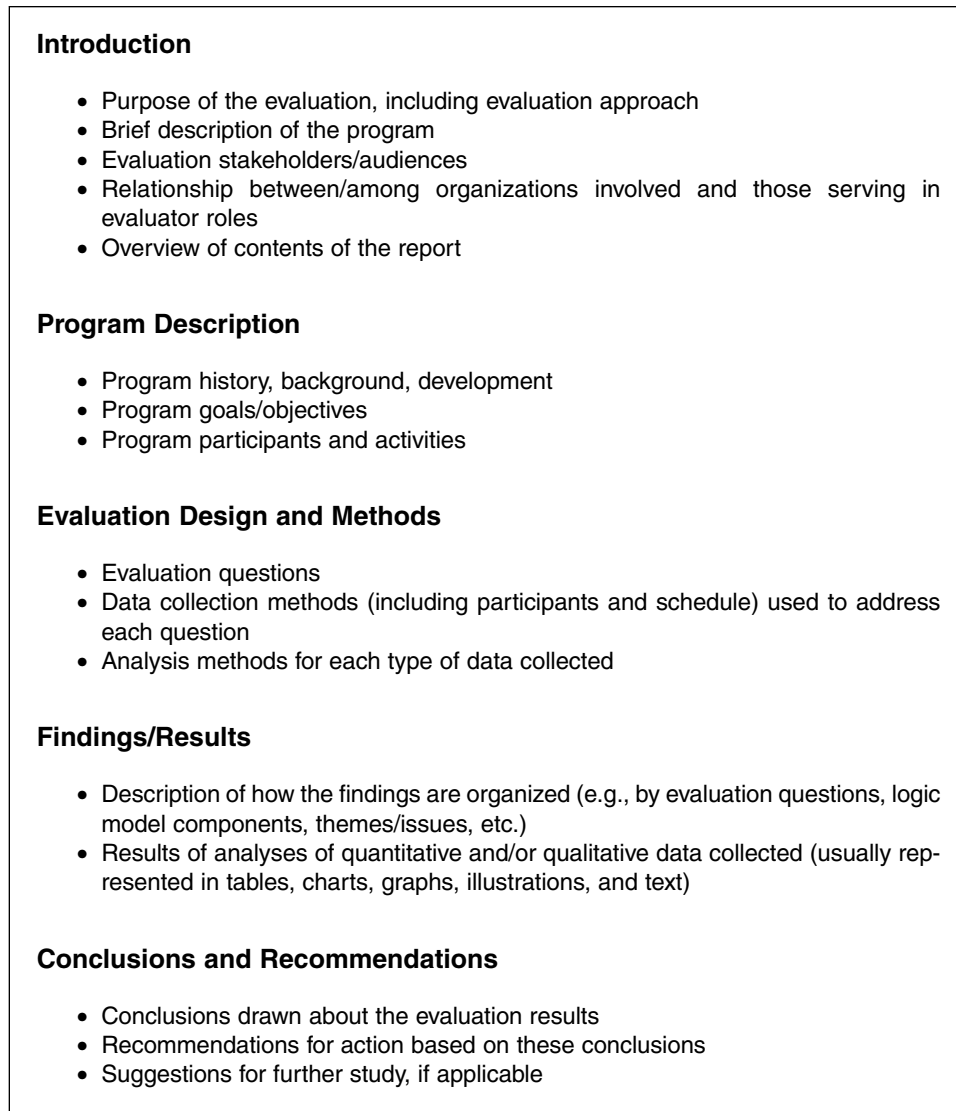
Introduction

- Purpose of the evaluation, including evaluation approach
- Brief description of the program
- Evaluation stakeholders/audiences
- Relationship between/among organizations involved and those serving in evaluator roles
- Overview of contents of the report

Program Description

- Program history, background, development
- Program goals/objectives
- Program participants and activities

Evaluation Design and Methods

- Evaluation questions
- Data collection methods (including participants and schedule) used to address each question
- Analysis methods for each type of data collected

Findings/Results

- Description of how the findings are organized (e.g., by evaluation questions, logic model components, themes/issues, etc.)
- Results of analyses of quantitative and/or qualitative data collected (usually represented in tables, charts, graphs, illustrations, and text)

Conclusions and Recommendations

- Conclusions drawn about the evaluation results
- Recommendations for action based on these conclusions
- Suggestions for further study, if applicable

Figure 3.21   Typical Sections and Contents of Comprehensive Written Evaluation Reports

SOURCE: Adapted from Torres (2001).

CASE EXAMPLE 3.3

Communicating Evaluation Findings in Federal Government Annual Reports

Most federally funded grant programs require grantees to submit annual reports. The general purpose of the reports is to provide the program director assigned to monitor the grant an overview of what has occurred during the previous year. Federal agencies have limited control over the format or content of the report, although many provide suggested guidelines. The reports submitted vary, but most provide descriptions of the year's activities, demographic data about the population served, and statistics about key aspects of the project. Primary authors of the reports tend to be grant or project staff, not the evaluator(s) for the project.

With the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (GPRA), the primary audience for these annual reports has moved beyond the federal program director. GPRA requires federal agencies to report annual outcome data to Congress for each major program within their agency. Agencywide GPRA reports demonstrate accountability for federal expenditures and highlight each agency's annual performance. Key sources of GPRA data are large-scale evaluations of federal programs and the grantees' annual reports. Federal program officers increasingly use annual report data to justify the existence of a specific initiative, create GPRA nuggets or vignettes, develop a future research agenda, and propose budget authorizations.

The grant program staff of one federal education agency sought technical support to help grantees in writing annual reports that would highlight the grants' accomplishments and outcomes. The grant program staff had found that the grantees' annual reports often did not

- Summarize major accomplishments or outcomes.
- State the intended outcomes in measurable terms.
- Present data to support goals for the reporting year.
- Incorporate evaluation data, relying only on accountability measures used by the school district.
- Explain how activities facilitated intended outcomes.
- Provide formative data that focused on project implementation.
- Describe how the data are being (or will be used) to make decisions about program activities.
- Identify challenges encountered in the past year and what was being done to overcome them.
- Present data in a uniform, consistent display.

Technical support was provided to the grantees through a series of presentations at periodic conferences attended by grantee teams, which include staff,

data managers, and evaluators. The presentations ranged from 45 to 90 minutes and began with definitions and examples of messages, outcomes, activities, and evidence. Next, the grantees responded to four questions about their projects—questions that should be answered prior to writing the report:

1. What overarching messages do you want your reader to walk away with?

2. What outcomes will support your messages?

3. What activities led to those outcomes?

4. What evidence demonstrates outcome achievement?

In addition, the presentation showed that, in writing the report, the authors should:

- Use the active voice.
- Present the context (e.g., background information) about the setting of the grant and the participants.
- Offer compelling explanations of goals, activities, and progress.
- Write concise, data-based summaries of outcomes, as well as an executive summary.
- Present data (balancing text and graphics, choosing and displaying data)
- Prepare a visually pleasing report by creating summary boxes, labeling data exhibits, inserting page numbers and footers, using subheadings, and including a table of contents.

As a follow-up to the presentation, grantees voluntarily sent the support team their draft annual report for review. After reviewing the draft report, the support team conducted a 60- to 90-minute conference call with the grant team. Grantees were encouraged to include data managers and evaluators in the call. Throughout the call, the support team assisted the grantees in developing key messages and identifying data to support those messages (e.g., classroom observations, classroom walk-throughs, SAT/ACT scores, college admission statistics, end-of-course or grade data, and high-stakes assessment data across all grade levels and subgroups of students).

Federal program directors reported that the technical support improved how the grantees' reports (1) highlight key information related to accomplishing the program's goals; (2) align the data displays and the narrative; and (3) organize the data and narrative in a useful and usable manner.

SOURCE: Case described with permission of Kathy Zantal-Wiener.

External evaluators are more likely than internal evaluators to write a final/technical report (Torres et al., 1997). This practice serves both as a means of accountability for their work and as a basis from which stakeholders can work with the findings, with or without the involvement of the external evaluator. Also, comprehensive final reports can help orient new personnel. They can be given copies of recent evaluation reports for a concise, often incisive orientation to a program or issue.

Figure 3.22 shows a report checklist that details characteristics of a comprehensive report, from the title page through references and appendices. It also includes specific standards from *The Program Evaluation Standards* (Joint Committee, 1994) relevant to evaluation reporting. As the instructions indicate, this checklist can be used as a tool to guide a discussion between evaluators and their clients about the contents of evaluation reports (see also Figure 3.23) and also as a means of providing formative feedback to report writers. When several persons are working on the same report, the checklist can help to delegate, coordinate, and monitor progress among contributors.

Evaluation Report Checklist

Gary Miron
April 2004

The Evaluation Report Checklist has two intended applications:

1. A tool to guide a discussion between evaluators and their clients regarding the preferred contents of evaluation report(s)
2. A tool to provide formative feedback to report writers. Evaluators can self-rate their own progress during the writing phase. They can also use the checklist to identify weaknesses or areas that need to be addressed in their evaluation report(s). When there are two or more persons working on the same report, the checklist can help to delegate, coordinate, and monitor progress among the contributors.

Evaluation reports differ greatly in terms of purpose, budget, and a whole host of other factors. If one uses this checklist to evaluate actual reports or draw comparisons across reports, one would need to consider or weigh these factors.

This checklist draws upon and reflects the Program Evaluation Standards (Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation, 1994).

Instructions: Rate each section of the report using the following rubrics. Place a numeric character or check in the cell that corresponds to your rating on each checkpoint. If the item or checkpoint is not applicable to the report, indicate the "NA" cell to the far right. The formula for the overall score reflects the mean rating for each section. This will calculate automatically in the spreadsheet version of the checklist. Additional checkpoints may be added as agreed upon by those using the checklist.

Figure 3.22   Evaluation Report Checklist

SOURCE: Used with permission of The Evaluation Center, Western Michigan University.

***0 = Not addressed,   1 = Poor/inadequately addressed,   2 = Fair/partially addressed,
3 = Good/mostly addressed,   4 = Excellent/fully addressed   NA = Not applicable***

	0	1	2	3	4		NA

1. Title Page   Overall Score: **0.0**

	0	1	2	3	4		NA
A. Title identifies what was evaluated, including target population, if applicable							
B. Title is sufficiently clear and concise to facilitate indexing							
C. Authors' names and affiliations are identified							
D. Date of preparation is included							
E. Text and material on title page are clearly and properly arranged							
F.							

Comments:

2. Executive Summary   Overall Score: **0.0**

	0	1	2	3	4		NA
A. Description of program/project							
B. Evaluation questions and purpose of the evaluation							
C. Concise summary of main findings							
D. Implications of findings							
E. Recommendations, if appropriate							
F.							

Comments:

Figure 3.22 *(Continued)*

0 = Not addressed,   1 = Poor/inadequately addressed,   2 = Fair/partially addressed,
3 = Good/mostly addressed,   4 = Excellent/fully addressed   NA = Not applicable

	0	1	2	3	4		NA
3. Table of Contents and Other Sections That Preface the Report Overall Score: **0.0**							
A. Table of contents contains at least all first- and second-level headers in the reports							
B. Titles and page numbers are accurate							
C. Lists of tables, figures, and appendices are included, if appropriate							
D. List of acronyms or abbreviations is included, if appropriate							
E. Acknowledgments section with reference to sponsors, data collectors, informants, contributors to the report, research assistants, reviewers of the report, etc., is included							
F.							

Comments:

	0	1	2	3	4		NA
4. Introduction and Background Overall Score: **0.0**							
A. Purpose of evaluation and evaluation questions, if not covered in the methodology section							
B. Description of the program/project or phenomenon being evaluated (including historical context, if appropriate)							
C. Identification of target population for program, and relevant audiences and stakeholders for the evaluation							
D. Review of related research							
E. Overview and description of structure of report							
F.							

Comments:

Figure 3.22 *(Continued)*

0 = **Not addressed,   1** = **Poor/inadequately addressed,   2** = **Fair/partially addressed,**
3 = **Good/mostly addressed,   4** = **Excellent/fully addressed   NA** = **Not applicable**

	0	1	2	3	4		NA
5. Methodology Overall Score: **0.0**							
A. Purpose of evaluation and evaluation questions, if not covered in the introduction							
B. Evaluation approach or model being used, as well as rationale for the approach or model							
C. Methods of data collection							
D. Design of the evaluation including timing of data collection and use of specific data collection methods							
E. Sources of information and data							
F. Limitations of the evaluation							
G.							

Comments:

	0	1	2	3	4		NA
6. Results Chapters Overall Score: **0.0**							
A. Details of the evaluation findings are clearly and logically described							
B. Charts, tables, and graphs are appropriately labeled and understandable							
C. Discussion of evaluation findings is objective and includes both negative and positive findings							
D. All evaluation questions are addressed or an explanation is included for questions that could not be answered							
E. Findings are adequately justified							
F.							

Comments:

Figure 3.22 *(Continued)*

0 = *Not addressed,*   **1** = *Poor/inadequately addressed,*   **2** = *Fair/partially addressed,*
3 = *Good/mostly addressed,*   **4** = *Excellent/fully addressed*   **NA** = *Not applicable*

	0	1	2	3	4	NA

7. Summary, Conclusion, and Recommendations						Overall Score: **0.0**
A. Summaries of findings are included in each chapter or all together in a summary chapter						
B. Discussion and interpretation of findings are included						
C. Summary and conclusion fairly reflect the findings						
D. Judgments about the program that cover merit and worth are included						
E. If appropriate, recommendations are included and they are based on findings in the report						
F.						

Comments:

8. References and Appendices						Overall Score: **0.0**
A. A suitable style or format (e.g., APA) is used consistently for all references						
B. References are free of errors						
C. References cover all in-text citations						
D. All appendices referenced in the text are included in the appendices section, and vice versa						
E. Data and information in the appendices are clearly presented and explained						
F.						

Comments:

Figure 3.22 *(Continued)*

Implementation Tips for Final Reports

- **Carefully consider the need for a formal, comprehensive final report with stakeholders at the time the evaluation is being designed. Budget adequate time and funds to produce a final report.**

A major consideration in the decision to produce a comprehensive final report is cost. From beginning to end, the production of a final report can be the most expensive aspect of the evaluation endeavor. First, the primary authors of the report must (1) compile and organize the presentation of data; (2) make interpretations and draw conclusions; and (3) develop recommendations. Then, considerable time is required to (1) format and paginate the report; (2) make revisions in wording, format, spelling, and grammar; and (3) complete final editing. The production of charts, tables, and graphics is also time consuming. In particular, sufficient time must be allocated for catching typographical and formatting errors in the final version. Invariably, reports that leave the author's hands too quickly for duplication end up containing errors. Further complicating this process, completion of the report usually must be timed to coincide with organizational (decision-making) events involving use of the evaluation's findings. Case Example 3.4 illustrates a situation where a decision was made not to produce a traditional, comprehensive final report. The evaluation was designed to collect no more data than could be successfully analyzed, interpreted, and reported for the time and money available.

- **Recognize that developing the final report plays a key role in the analysis and integration of findings.**

The biggest advantage to the comprehensive report is that it provides the opportunity to take the most integrative approach to interpreting data and making recommendations. In the analysis stage of either quantitative or qualitative data, findings are not necessarily integrated, but rather, distinctly represented in quantitative tables and/or separate piles of coded and sorted interview transcripts or observation notes. Forgoing a final report can leave the analysis and integration process at this beginning level. Conversely, development of a comprehensive report forces the evaluator to consider how various findings are interrelated. Some of the most compelling and useful reports integrate all sources of data on particular aspects or issues. Reports fashioned in this way can tell a story about the program.

This integration provides a view of the program that in many instances would not otherwise be seen. Nor are clients likely to know that such a view is missing if they agree to a situation where a comprehensive report is not produced. This fuller synthesis is something clients often appreciate once they have seen it.

CASE EXAMPLE 3.4

Deciding Not to Produce a Comprehensive Final Report

The Woodland Park School District is a small rural district in Woodland Park, Colorado. Over a 2-year period, the district had been experiencing the frequent use of overtime by its support staff in the high school office. The superintendent and director of business services were concerned about this expense and had been searching unsuccessfully for an external consultant who could conduct an efficiency study. Finally, the superintendent contacted a local evaluator (one of this book's authors) about the possibility of investigating this issue.

After several site visits to the district, the evaluator and district administrators established that the purpose of the desired study would be to develop a thorough understanding of how the high school office operates, including (1) how the job responsibilities of staff are carried out; (2) how school administrators and students are involved in the work of the office; (3) the extent to which the work is accurate; (4) the nature and amount of work conducted beyond normal working hours; and (5) the internal and external factors that contribute to how the office operates. Data collection methods would be primarily qualitative—observations and interviews with school personnel. The superintendent intended to use the study's findings in collaboration with school personnel to determine how the efficiency of the office could be improved while at the same time maintaining the district's commitment to excellence in the education of its students. Staffing implications of any recommended changes would be considered in time for the following school year. This schedule meant that the study would have to be completed in three months—by April of the previous school year.

It was decided at the outset that the evaluator's work would not include the production of a comprehensive final report. The superintendent's intent was to resolve the issues surrounding overtime accrual in the most cost-effective manner possible. There was no plan to make a formal presentation of the study's findings to the board but, rather, to use them as quickly and effectively as possible to make improvements.

Findings from the interviews and observations would be integrated and illustrated in a graphic representation of how the high school office operates, including influencing factors. This illustration was to be presented in draft form to high school and district personnel. Their input concerning its accuracy and completeness would be solicited in a working session. The outcomes of this session would then be used to modify the illustration. In the second phase of the same session or in a subsequent session, implications of the study's findings would also be developed in collaboration with school and district staff.

The reporting plan (included in the evaluation plan) specified that the evaluator would provide a brief report about one week after these working sessions. It was to contain (1) the revised illustration of the high school office operations; (2) a concise explanation of the illustration; and (3) a summary of the recommendations developed by school and district personnel. The appropriate staff would be asked to review a draft version of this report before the final version was submitted.

SOURCE: Case described with permission from Woodland Park School District, Woodland Park, Colorado.

■ **Involve stakeholders in the preparation and review of final reports.**

From our standpoint, the best evaluation practice is a collaborative one, where participants and other stakeholders are involved in the evaluation from beginning to end. This means, of course, that their major involvement with the evaluation would not be merely as recipients of the final report. Figure 3.23 shows a form used by FERA, Inc., a Michigan-based evaluation consulting group, to get input from their clients about the audiences, length, and characteristics of the final report FERA will deliver. Notice Item 4, which asks for an opportunity for dialogue about the evaluation findings.

At a minimum, program participants should always be given the opportunity to review a draft version of a final report. (Hopefully, prior to this time, stakeholders have been involved with the development of a reporting plan that includes the timing and format of reports, and they have seen interim results, if called for.) A major aspect of evaluation use begins with the participants' review of the draft version of the report. (In some cases, this review may constitute their only reading of the final report, as they may find little time among competing priorities to do so again once the revised version comes out.)

Yet, obtaining and incorporating feedback about a final report from a large number of program participants can be cumbersome. Figure 3.24 shows instructions given to a program staff of approximately 50. They are asked for their input on (1) the report's clarity, accuracy, and format and (2) the appropriateness of its conclusions and recommendations. They are also reminded about a meeting to discuss revisions to be made on the basis of their input. Evaluation use invariably begins during this kind of working session. Using the evaluation's description of the program as the basis for discussion, staff members have the opportunity to clarify any misunderstandings about the program that may exist among themselves. Consideration of the report's conclusions and recommendations almost always leads to discussion about how to implement recommendations. (See the sections on working sessions in Chapter 4 and on developing recommendations in Chapter 6 for further information on these topics.)

■ **Select an organizing framework for the findings that maximizes the report's relevance and use for evaluation audiences.**

The findings section of the final report can be organized according to any of several frameworks:

- The evaluation questions
- The program's logic model or theory of action
- Decision-making processes within the life cycle of the program
- Emergent themes or categories that tell the program's story

We believe the main criteria for your choice among these should be maximizing the audiences' learning from and use of the report. Given that the *evaluation questions* reflect stakeholders' leading concerns about the evaluand,

FERA *Formative Evaluation Research Associates*

REPORTING RECOMMENDATIONS

1. What individuals or groups do you see as the primary audience(s) for the report? Please circle the **most** important group.

   a.

   b.

   c.

2. What length report, given the demands on people's time, do you think is appropriate?

Audience (from above)	Abstract (1–2 pp)	Executive Summary (5–10 pp)	Medium Length (11–25 pp)	Lengthy (26+ pp)
a.	_____	_____	_____	_____
b.	_____	_____	_____	_____
c.	_____	_____	_____	_____

3. How important are the following reporting characteristics?

Characteristics	Very	Quite	Somewhat	Not Too	Not At All
a. Quantitative presentation (e.g., tables, graphs)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
b. Narrative description	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
c. Discussion of the implications	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
d. Presentation of recommendations	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
e. Extensive documentation of the research methods	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

4. How important is an oral presentation of the report by the research team which would allow for clarification, elaboration, and brainstorming on the implications of the evaluation?

   ____ Very   ____ Quite   ____ Somewhat   ____ Not Too   ____ Not At All

5. What one piece of advice would you offer regarding our final reporting?

Figure 3.23   Example of Form for Soliciting Client Input to Style and Length of Final Report

SOURCE: Used with permission of FERA, Inc.

Staff Feedback Form for Final Draft of the Evaluation Report

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Please provide feedback about the final report, considering each of the following:
    a. areas/sections you feel don't make sense

    b. areas which you feel may be inaccurate and require further explanation (keeping in mind differences across program sites)

    c. any conclusions or recommendations you feel should be added or revised

    d. any other questions or comments you have about the report

2. Complete page 2 as appropriate. In giving feedback, be sure to identify the page and line number you are referring to, and then explain your concern. For example, *p. 6, lines 10–15 — The point of the paragraph is not clear to me. What is meant by . . .?*

3. Alternatively, you can make comments in the margins of the report pages, but don't forget to complete the last page of this attachment.

4. As you review this report, please consider being part of a Focus Group meeting on September 7th at 3:45 P.M. to discuss feedback to the report and revisions that will be made.

5. Return your feedback to the Program Office <u>on or before Monday, August 29th</u>.

6. If you have any questions or concerns, don't hesitate to call [the evaluator] at xxx-xxxx.

Figure 3.24   Form for Obtaining Feedback on Draft Version of Final Report

> | *YOUR FEEDBACK* | PLEASE RESPOND TO EACH OF THE FOLLOWING, USING THE BACK OF THESE SHEETS AS NECESSARY: |
>
> **Address areas/sections that you feel do not make sense:**
>
> **Address areas that you feel may be inaccurate and require further explanation** (keeping in mind differences which do exist across program sites)**:**
>
> **Address any conclusions or recommendations you feel should be added or revised:**
>
> **Address any other questions or comments you have about the report:**
>
> *Thanks for your input and interest in the evaluation! Don't forget about the focus group on Wednesday, September 7th.*

Figure 3.24 *(Continued)*

this may be the obvious choice for organizing the report. It's important to consider, though, that another framework may better represent the evaluand in terms of how the audience relates to it at the time findings are available. For example, following the program's *logic model* or *theory of action* (see Torres, 2005, p. 240) may help audiences better understand the crucial linkages between program activities and outcomes. Figure 3.25 shows the theory of action for KidzLit, an after-school enrichment program developed and disseminated by the Developmental Studies Center (DSC) in Oakland, CA. Organizing formative evaluation findings according to the components of this theory of action helped DSC program staff reflect on the program holistically, taking into account key linkages between program activities and outcomes.

Another strategy is to identify an approach to the report that relates the findings to stakeholders' *decision-making processes,* that is, the ongoing planning and improvement processes within the life of the program (Morris et al., 1987). For instance, many programs in school districts have committees composed of staff members who are charged with planning and improvement activities for specific aspects of the program. The evaluation report can be organized to present findings according to the charges of the different committees. Case Example 3.5 illustrates how this approach was used with a companywide task force charged with developing a compressed workweek program.
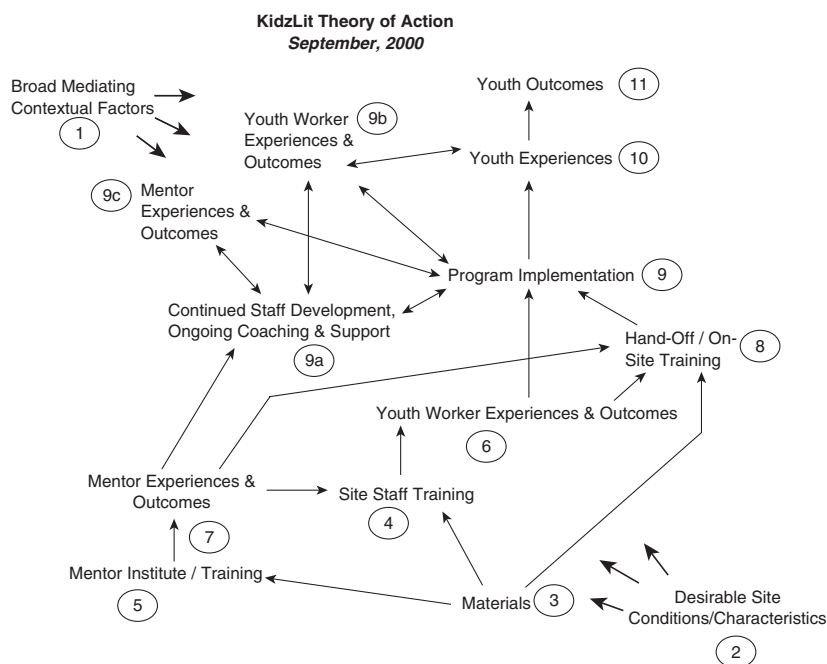

Figure 3.25   Theory of Action for After-School Enrichment Program

SOURCE: Used with permission of Developmental Studies Center.

CASE EXAMPLE 3.5

Aligning the Format of a Final Report With Decision-Making Processes

An internal companywide task force of a large training organization was charged with developing a compressed workweek program for employees. After several months' work, the task force produced an employee handbook explaining the program and all aspects of its implementation, including work schedule options; use of the program during holiday weeks and in conjunction with vacation; how to record overtime; core hours when employees must be present; and so forth. The task force also had worked with an external evaluator to document the outcomes of the program and to identify ways in which it could be improved. Specific issues investigated by the evaluation included those articulated by senior management about costs of the program and those identified through interviews with employees about their experiences with the program. Based on the evaluation findings, the task force intended to modify the program and produce a new version of the employee handbook.

During a meeting with the evaluator, when initial evaluation findings were being presented and discussed, members of the task force expressed their desire that the evaluation report be structured along the lines of the original employee handbook. They reasoned that this approach would simplify the process of modifying the handbook based on the evaluation findings. The evaluator developed the report accordingly, matching evaluation findings with the appropriate sections of the handbook. To further facilitate the work of the task force, key sections of the handbook were reproduced within the report in shaded boxes.

The final report will also be used by the organization's senior managers, who are interested in results on specific issues for each of their departments. The report's 78 tables, which show survey results by department and position, are listed in an alternative table of contents under the main headings "Program Impacts" and "Program Implementation."

An executive summary that accompanies the final report presents the findings according to three main issues: impact of the program, employee support for the program, and program implementation. This organization paralleled a conceptualization of the program that had been developed by the evaluator based on interviews with program participants.

The trade-off with this strategy is that it may not allow for a perspective on the program that is very different from the way participants and other stakeholders saw it to begin with. That is, the framework for presenting the evaluation findings comes from within the program or organization itself. Yet, in some cases, primary stakeholders are particularly well informed by an alternative perspective on themselves—one afforded by a different set of eyes.

A solution to this trade-off, although time consuming, is to develop two reports: one that organizes findings according to the program's decision-making framework and the other that organizes findings according to an alternative framework. In Case Example 3.5, the evaluator produced both a report organized according to the contents of an existing employee handbook and an executive summary that described the relationship among three major elements as conceptualized by the evaluator (program impact, employee support for the program, and program implementation).

A fourth approach is to consider the *emergent themes or categories* that tell the program's story. For some evaluations the most compelling framework for presenting the findings may be unknown at the outset. That is, an inductive approach to the analysis of the evaluation data often reveals an organizing framework that in and of itself represents the evaluation findings, and does so in a way that describes the program from a new perspective. This approach was used in Case Example 3.4. (The section on integrating qualitative and quantitative findings in Chapter 6 provides more information about developing useful organizing frameworks for the presentation of findings.)

■ **Consider alternative sequencing for the arrangement of report sections.**

Rather than using the traditional format of a journal article (introduction, methodology, findings, conclusions, and recommendations), you can make the most interesting and useful contents of your evaluation reports more accessible by moving the findings and recommendations forward in the report. Consider these options:

- Describe the methodology briefly in an introductory section, and present it fully within an appendix.
- Organize the report by the evaluation questions (or other questions which guide the reader or main topic areas). Immediately after each question, describe the data that addresses the question, and then present a summary of the findings and recommendations. Detailed presentations of methods and findings can be included in appendices.
- Organize the report by the recommendations. For each recommendation, present conclusions and evidence (i.e., the evaluation findings) to support it.
- If you have numerous tables or graphs, put them in an appendix and reference the specific appendix pages throughout the section that describes the findings.

Whatever organizational structure your report has, another strategy to engage readers is to describe how the report is organized inside its front cover, as shown in Figure 3.26.

HOW IS THIS REPORT ORGANIZED?

➔ This report consists of a summary of findings to 17 questions addressing major aspects of the 2003–04 Blended Preschool.

➔ Each question is designed to cover all issues related to the topic it addresses and contains the following information:

⇒ A review of the specific data used to answer the question

⇒ A section on overall findings, which includes information about the implementation of recommendations made for the 2003–04 school year, as well as recommendations for 2004–05.

⇒ A presentation of findings in terms of two or more subcategories, as shown with each question below

⇒ Discussion of findings from both quantitative and qualitative survey items (i.e., responses to open-ended items)

⇒ Where appropriate, comparisons between this year's and last year's findings

⇒ Discussion of different findings by teacher level and background only if they are significantly different, as revealed by statistical tests

⇒ Tables displaying results from quantitative survey item.

➔ The report concludes with a final summarizing question.

➔ Each of the data collection instruments used is provided in an appendix.

Figure 3.26 Example of Description of Report Organization Placed Inside Front Cover of Evaluation Report

Executive Summaries

An executive summary or abstract is essentially a shortened version of a longer evaluation report. It enables readers to get vital information about the evalu- and without the time constraints of reading and assimilating an entire report. It typically is written to address the needs of busy decision makers and is especially useful for quick dissemination of findings. Evaluators write executive summaries for up to 75% of the evaluations they do (Torres et al., 1997).

Summaries are usually positioned at the front of the longer document. Their chief advantage is that they can be reproduced separately and disseminated as needed. Summaries can vary in length from one paragraph to several pages. When resources for reproduction and distribution are limited, an executive summary offers an alternative to the longer document (Joint Committee, 1994).

Comprehensive executive summaries usually contain condensed versions of all the major sections of a full report: background/program description, methodology, findings, conclusions, and recommendations. The intent is to communicate the essential messages of the original document accurately and concisely. Few people will read the entire document, some will skim parts of

it, but most will read the executive summary. For this reason, it is especially important that executive summaries be well written.

Summaries can also be tailored to address the needs of particular audiences, emphasizing different program elements and findings. They can consist solely of significant or essential information required for a particular audience or dissemination situation (Lannon, 1991). Case 3.6 describes how an executive summary was adapted to meet a variety of audience information needs during and after an evaluation. Decisions about what to include in a summary depend largely on

- The audience's familiarity with the program or organization
- The audience's interests or expectations
- The audience's needs for particular kinds of information
- Both the author's and the audience's time constraints
- Dissemination plans/costs
- The type(s) of data collected and the analyses conducted during the evaluation
- The existence of multiple sites or multiple audiences within a site

CASE EXAMPLE 3.6

Meeting a Variety of Information Needs With an Executive Summary

After working on a yearlong curriculum review of a Master's degree program within a university department, the evaluator prepared an 80-page report outlining the findings from document reviews and interviews (individual and focus group) involving approximately 100 individuals from seven different stakeholder groups. The 80-page report covered the traditional areas of evaluation design and data collection, summary of evaluation findings, recommendations and next steps, and appendices of the data collection instruments. Within the report, the evaluator included a 15-page executive summary that provided a condensed version of the evaluation design and the overall findings, along with a list of the 21 recommendations and 68 subrecommendations for improving the Master's level program.

While the 80-page report was of great interest to the faculty and staff who served on the curriculum committee that worked with the evaluator throughout the project, the 15-page executive summary was a more appropriate document for distributing to the department's faculty and staff who had participated in the data collection. The executive summary was also appropriate for other audiences who were tangentially involved in the evaluation, including university administrators and professional organizations. The evaluator used the executive summary to create two additional documents for use at the department retreat the following month, at which she was serving as a facilitator: (1) a survey for the faculty and staff to rank the recommendations they considered most important for discussing at the department retreat; and (2) a two-page retreat worksheet used by small groups of faculty/staff to prioritize subrecommendations and create action steps for implementation in the subsequent academic year.

Implementation Tips for Executive Summaries

■ **Tailor the content of the executive summary to audience information needs and dissemination plans.**

Sometimes, an audience is unfamiliar with the evaluand or has been involved only peripherally with the evaluation. In this case, a greater proportion of the executive summary should contain descriptive information on the program or organization itself and on the purpose and procedures of the evaluation (including, but not limited to, the evaluation purpose, questions, and methodology). This more inclusive approach should also be considered if dissemination plans include reaching a wide range of audiences, multiple sites within a program or organization, or the news media. In many cases the executive summary will be distributed without the full evaluation report and is intended as an independent, self-contained message. Sufficient background information on the program, the purpose of the evaluation, and its methodology should be included. In addition, whatever the contents or format of a summary, remember to avoid jargon, abbreviations, acronyms, and colloquialisms or slang—or, clearly define them in simple, commonsense language.

If an audience is familiar with the program or organization, then a smaller proportion of the executive summary may include descriptive material. Sometimes, a summary may contain only findings and recommendations. It is not uncommon for an executive summary that exclusively focuses on findings and recommendations to be reformatted and disseminated as a bulletin, memo, postcard, or fax, or as a poster presentation in other settings or for other audiences. Figure 3.27 shows a summary containing interim findings across seven community-based, after-school programs within a school district. The evaluators organized this report in terms of "lessons we're learning" in an attempt to "keep it positive, appreciative, focused on what's working, and focused on how different sites can learn from the other sites about what is effective" (Preskill, S., 2004).

■ **Format the executive summary for easy assimilation of its contents.**

Multiple formats can be used that best elicit interest and response from particular audiences or that most efficiently present different types of information. The executive summary should be consistent in tone and intent with the original document but can be rearranged, reworded, and re-proportioned. Frequently, an executive summary will follow the format of the longer document—a full page of single-spaced text with headings and subheadings as appropriate. Alternatively, it can take on a question-and-answer format, using the evaluation questions and program outcomes to report findings and recommendations.

If findings and recommendations make up the bulk of the summary, statements set off by white space, boxes, lines, bullets, or other graphics make it

easier to assimilate, as shown in Figure 3.27. Another way to make the summary easy to read is to format it into two columns. Similarly, colored print or paper and/or separate binding of the summary facilitate its dissemination as an alternative document (Worthen, Sanders, & Fitzpatrick, 1997). Figure 3.28 provides a four-page executive summary created by the Pew Partnership for Civic Change. Several features make it appealing and useful for readers: color, interesting graphics, text formatted in columns, boxed call-out, recommendations highlighted in a separate section, and information about where to get the full report. (To see this figure in color, go to http://www.sagepub.com/escr.)

■ **Use a summary process to ensure coherent, consistent content.**

One approach to creating an executive summary is simply to cut and paste portions of the original document into the summary, and to write appropriate transitions. Usually, though, producing an executive summary requires some kind of summarizing process that focuses your attention on the key ideas and significant information you want to communicate. One strategy that produces a concise summary consists of seven steps (adapted from Lannon, 1991, p. 143):

Guidelines for Writing a Summary

- *Read the original document from beginning to end.* It is important to fully understand all aspects of the original document before attempting to summarize it.
- *Reread and underline all key ideas, significant statements, and vital recommendations.* Focus on the main ideas and major supporting statements.
- *Edit the underlined information.* Eliminate all but key phrases; you will rework these into sentences later.
- *Rewrite the underlined information.* Do not worry about conciseness; you will edit later.
- *Edit the rewritten version.* Eliminate needless/repetitive words and phrases and combine related ideas.
- *Check the edited version against the original document.* Focus on verifying that you have captured the essential information/message of the original. Check to see if you have altered the meaning of any statements or added unrelated information; if so, delete.
- *Rewrite your edited work.* This final version should be written for clarity and conciseness, focusing on smooth transitions and clear connections of ideas.

Lessons We're Learning

What Works in After-School, Community-Based Programs
November 20, 2003

Strong Leadership

Site facilitators are good listeners, observers, and guides who develop and share powerful conceptions of a quality program; maintain ongoing communication with staff; support the staff and the program in continuing to improve; stay in close touch with parents; and continue to invite and increase parent participation.

Relationship Building

Time and space are found for adults and kids to develop relationships, to have "downtime" together. One of the most striking findings of the entire evaluation has to do with the rich and moving bonds that have brought youth and adults closer together. Clearly, these relationships are among the project's most attractive aspects for youth and adults alike. Relationship building also enhances learning, especially since it occurs in a racially and ethnically diverse group of people.

Visions of Literacy

Kids develop their reading and writing skills in a variety of settings to serve multiple purposes. Time and space are found to support and reinforce a love of reading and writing. The activities the youth engage in and the materials they use are themed to anti-racism, nonviolence, civic literacy, community appreciation, community information gathering, and empowerment.

Management and Organization

The sites establish simple organizational procedures for kids, rehearse them regularly, and then stick to them. Formal and informal dialogues are important parts of the curriculum where respect, listening, and turn-taking are observed. Attention is paid to taking positive, respectful, yet prompt action to maintain discipline and enhance cooperation. Space for homework is found, while leaving room for plenty of other creative activities.

Love of Learning

A mix of activities is used, including painting, cooking, building, role-playing, storytelling, and experimenting. Projects are occasionally introduced that allow the whole group to work on something for a sustained period. Staff members frequently bring their interests, passions, and academic studies into what they teach the youth. Staff members consistently model their own love of learning.

Planning

Regular planning sessions are built into the weekly schedule, and time is allowed for exploratory conversations among adults that focus on how to continue to improve the program.

Parental/Community Involvement

Regular parent and community meetings are held, as well as special sessions that are likely to attract more and new parents and community members. Feedback is invited from parents about what is happening in the programs. Parents and community members are encouraged to play a leadership role in continuing to improve the programs.

Figure 3.27   Executive Summary of Interim Findings

SOURCE: Used with permission of Stephen Preskill, University of New Mexico.

In It for the Long Haul: Community Partnerships Making a Difference

Executive Summary

America's tradition of working together is alive and well according to a survey of 600 of the top business, nonprofit, and local government leaders in the 200 largest cities. The survey, conducted in July 2001, by the Campaign Study Group for the Pew Partnership for Civic Change, probed leaders about the status of partnership in their communities, why partnerships are important, and the kinds of interactions across sectors that have become business as usual. The clear message from these cross-sectoral leaders was that working together is not only better but essential. Over ninety percent of the leaders across sectors and locales said loud and clear, "working with others to solve problems takes more time but works in the long run." Further, these relationships have worked over the long haul because each sector feels that it has an important niche to fill.

- Business leaders placed the most value on their ability to deliver volunteers, money, expertise, leadership, and their business approach to problem solving.
- Nonprofit executives viewed their expertise in community issue areas, their desire to improve their communities, their volunteers, and their coordination and planning skills as their most valuable assets.
- Local government leaders cite their financial support, their pool of volunteers, their coordination and planning skills, their interest in community improvement, and their leadership skills as their key contributions.

The importance of community partnerships has taken on a greater significance since the tragedy of September 11th. Even before September, every community in the country was feeling some effects of the recession. At the federal level, we have seen a significant decline in the budget surplus. Critical areas such as education, healthcare, and job training must get in the funding line—the portions are smaller.

While federal support is critical to the launch and sustainability of many basic human services, we learned from the survey that community partnerships can be invaluable in assisting a community to take the resources available and make them stretch further. They do this in three very tangible ways: first—community partnerships can raise visibility on local issues—it is hard for communities to solve problems they do not know about; second, partnerships can assist communities set priorities for the allocation of resources; and third, community partnerships can unleash new talents and resources to address old problems. This survey gives some clues about how and with whom this can be done and toward what end.

How do the sectors see the problems?

When polled about the issues of critical importance to their community, the leaders weighed them differently but ultimately there were several problems that appeared on all three sectors' lists. Nine issues—illegal drugs, affordable healthcare, the lack of affordable housing, the lack of living-wage jobs, teenage pregnancy, the lack of affordable childcare, insufficient public transportation, too many unsupervised children and teenagers, and the lack of affordable care for the elderly—rank among the top problems according to each sector's leaders. These priorities across sectors provide considerable room for discussion and coordinated efforts to solve identified problems.

An area where the three groups of leaders clearly diverged was on the severity of problems facing the community. Local government officials proved the least likely to believe their communities have serious problems. At the opposite extreme, nonprofit leaders were more often than not the most likely to describe the same range of issues as posing serious problems for their communities. The

Pew Partnership for Civic Change poll shows sectors working together to solve community problems.

There are clear signals that the sectors are reaching beyond their own organizations to address communitywide issues.

Promising Areas

The news is very good for cross-sectoral partnerships in the nation's largest cities. A majority of business, nonprofit, and local government leaders are working together to address major community issues. But there are places and situations where more could be done and where bridges could be built. There are opportunities for business to use its leadership to critically analyze the problems and provide needed expertise toward the solutions; there are opportunities for the nonprofit sector to be the information and brokering arm of the community—joining needs with resources; and there are opportunities for local governments to take the lead in bringing the problem solvers together on a regular basis in order to make the community more aware of the issues facing it and their impact. Approximately half of all respondents reported that their community had no formal mechanism or organization to bring the sectors together around critical issues.

The survey data were rich with the documentation of the existence of strong partnerships in the largest metropolitan areas but there is still room to strengthen and develop local efforts. The following recommendations spotlight additional areas of exploration for all three sectors that can sustain existing efforts and open new vistas for partnership.

Specific Recommendations for Successful Partnerships

BUSINESSES

It's more than writing a check.

- Contribute expertise in management and marketing—not just financial resources.
- Conduct regular briefings with nonprofit and government leaders to ensure understanding of the problems facing your community and to prioritize the potential impact on employees and your region.
- Know the roles that nonprofits and specific government agencies play and what issues they are addressing.

NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

It's more than just funding.

- Make marketing, media relations, and public awareness top priorities to increase visibility and understanding of your issues.
- Communicate the impact of your program. Tell the stories of lives changed as a result of your work and resources.
- Solicit professional help—beyond fund-raising—from businesses in marketing and management strategies.

LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

It's going to take more than government.

- Recognize the contributions and resources that other community sectors can make in solving problems and solicit their opinions and assistance.
- Take advantage of your ability to convene or facilitate collaboration by assembling diverse leaders to address problems.
- Make information sharing among partners, potential partners, and the public a priority.

For a copy of the data highlights report, contact the Pew Partnership at (434) 971-2073 or visit www.pew-partnership.org

4

Figure 3.28 Four-Page Executive Summary

SOURCE: Used with permission of Pew Partnership for Civic Change.

opinions of business leaders tended to fall between the two other groups although they generally expressed attitudes closer to those held by government officials. This lack of agreement on the severity of the problems challenges the ability to agree on priorities—in fact, it almost guarantees disagreement and the need for deliberation—in times of economic scarcity. This finding provides a powerful opportunity for communities to assess their situations and to come to some consensus as a community on the longterm impact of social problems on the three sectors and the community at large.

One surprising finding from the survey dealt with local government and its perception of the community. These leaders were the most positive about the quality of life in their communities and the most likely of the three sectors to express a "go it alone" attitude toward problem solving. This disjuncture with other sectors suggests the need for an "honest broker" process in communities led by leaders from all sectors that gathers facts and figures about community issues. There should be a clear and agreed-upon assessment of the baseline data and information that relate to community issues.

How well do partnerships work?

Despite disagreements about the priority of issues, the ability of local partnerships to join interests with multiple resources has had overwhelming success according to those surveyed. Seventy-two percent of business leaders and approximately fifty percent of nonprofit leaders and local government leaders reported that the partnerships they have been involved with have been very successful. Only two percent or less indicated that their cooperative relationships had not been successful at all. This satisfaction with cooperative relationships begs the question, "What does it take to have a successful partnership?"

Respondents said that the two most important components of successful partnerships are: 1) a formal collaboration to which each sector contributes; and 2) long-term relationships and commitment. Other factors cited were dedicated people, open communication, ability to draw on multiple resources, ability to achieve objectives, and mutual trust.

What do partnerships do?

With all the talk about partnerships, we were very curious about the work of the partnerships: how each sector perceives partnership and its own role in collaborations. The respondents gave a clearer picture of both. The categories of partnership run from the particular to the general but generally rest in three areas: information sharing, financial and in-kind support, and tackling tough issues together.

Information Sharing

At the most basic level, these cooperative relationships began with the sharing of information. Nearly three-quarters of all nonprofit executives reported that their organizations currently send newsletters outlining their work or their resources to local business leaders and almost seventy percent correspond with local government.

Approximately two-thirds of the government officials interviewed also indicated that the city or county where they work distributes information about their programs and resources to the local business community and local charitable organizations.

Similarly, almost half of the business leaders interviewed said that their companies offer a community resource directory to all employees.

Validating the interaction between the sectors, half of all nonprofit leaders said that they had had an unsolicited offer from their local government in the last year to share information. The most frequently offered information was U.S. Census/demographic information, funding/financial information, and public health information. The nonprofits themselves count on the local government as an information source with two-thirds requesting data from local government over the last year.

Financial and In-Kind Support

Money and in-kind support were seen by all sectors as vehicles to join with community organizations to solve problems. Ninety-six percent of companies donate money to nonprofits according to the respondents. More than half of the business executives said that their companies match employee donations to charity. More than three-quarters of local government leaders reported that their local government provides funding to nonprofit groups. Seventy-nine percent of the business leaders surveyed said that their companies donated used or surplus equipment to local non-profit organizations. Further, sixty-nine percent of business leaders reported that their companies provide educational scholarships.

Approximately half of the nonprofit leaders said that their organizations had received public relations assistance, technology expertise, and strategic planning assistance from a local company. Local government was also a strong player in providing technical assistance to local nonprofit organizations with fifty-four percent providing such assistance.

Vast majorities of local government officials (90%) and nonprofit executives (82%) said they provide local community groups free access to their facilities for meetings or other activities. Slightly less than half of business leaders indicated that they make their corporate facilities available for the same purposes.

While financial support by the government and business sectors was strong, so was the attitude toward civic participation that was fostered in the workplace. Nearly nine out of ten business leaders and eight out of ten government officials indicated that their employers have organized programs to encourage employee charitable donations.

Tackling Tough Issues Together

There was a clear indication that the sectors are discussing the challenges and opportunities facing their communities—and acting on them. Almost three-quarters of the business and nonprofit leaders and ninety percent of the government leaders said that they work with other groups in the community to address important community issues. Although partnerships take different forms and directions, the survey found they clearly tend to be forged around key issues facing the community. When leaders were asked what they do specifically in the community to address problems several action strategies emerged.

• First and foremost, the leaders of the different sectors know each other and communicate on a regular basis. Nearly two-thirds of the government officials and slightly more than half of the business leaders surveyed said they meet regularly with local charitable and other nonprofit leaders.

• Second, they provide direct services to community organizations beyond giving and create a culture of caring within their organizations. More than half of all business lead-

> *Seventy-two percent of business leaders and approximately fifty percent of nonprofit leaders and local government leaders reported that the partnerships they had been involved with had been very successful.*

ers said their companies had organized employee participation in a formal mentoring program. This number reached seventy-five percent among those companies that indicated working closely with leaders from other sectors. About half of government leaders and nonprofit leaders said they do the same.

• Third, fifty-four percent of the business leaders surveyed said that their companies gave employees paid time off to volunteer.

Perhaps more surprising, forty percent of government officials said that their localities provide employees with paid time off to volunteer. As a way to recognize employees for their volunteer activities, three-quarters of the major employers have a formal recognition program.

• Fourth, eighty-six percent of business leaders and eighty-one percent of local government leaders say their employers organize employee participation in community activities such as walk-a-thons, food drives, and neighborhood clean-ups. Likewise, eighty-three percent of the nonprofit leaders surveyed said they actively enlist the support of suppliers and clients to volunteer or help solve a community problem.

Beyond these specific activities, leaders from business, local government, and nonprofit organizations serve on boards, commissions, and committees aimed at community problem solving. More than half of both the business and nonprofit executives indicated that either they or someone else within their organization had offered to serve on such a board in the last twelve months. More than half of the business and nonprofit leaders said that a county or city government had extended an invitation to serve to someone in their organization. Almost seventy percent of local government officials said that they had invited a local nonprofit leader to serve on a problem-solving commission and seventy-five percent had invited one or more business leaders to serve.
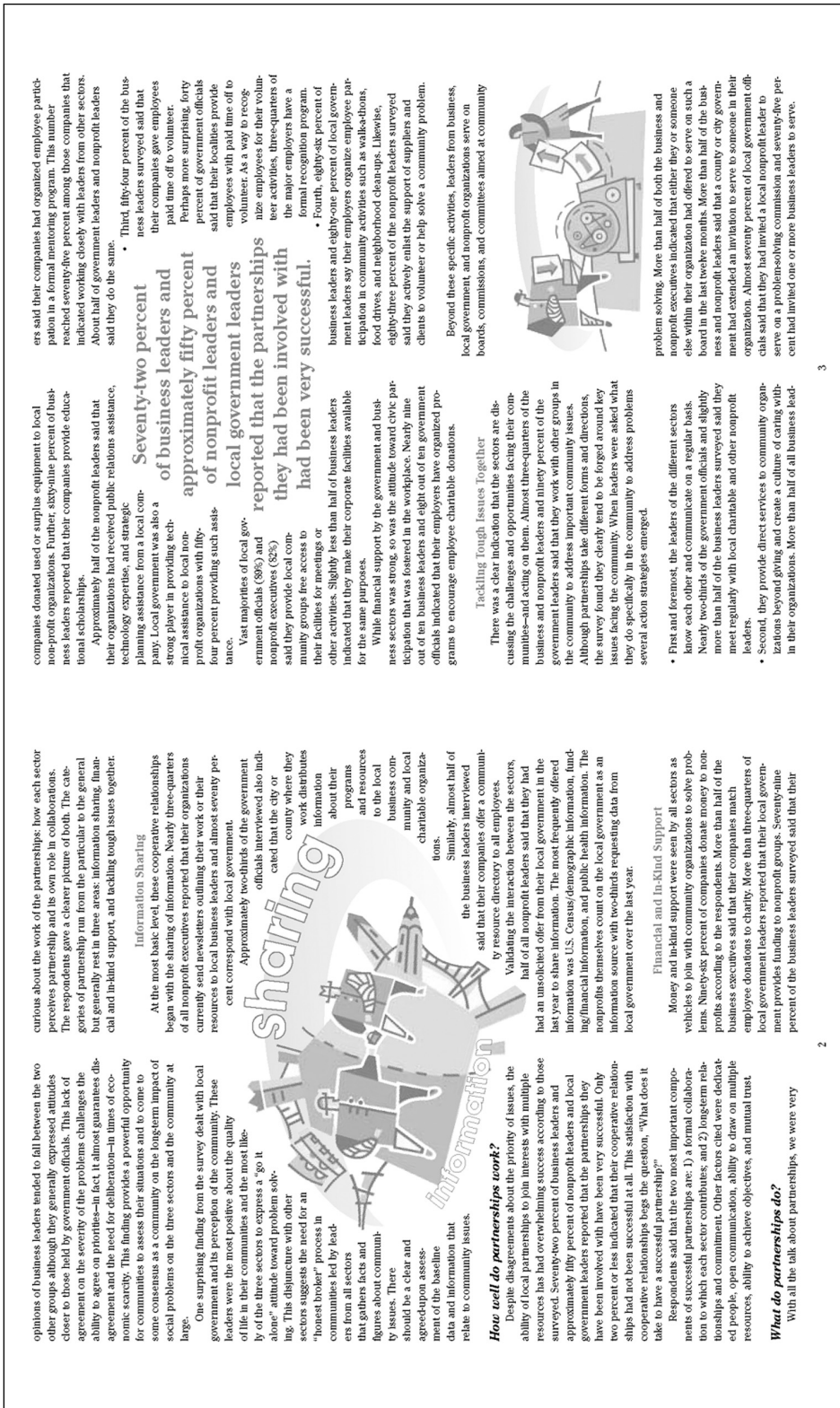
Figure 3.28 *(Continued)*

■ **Allow sufficient time for creating summaries.**

Time constraints on both yourself and the audience may limit the content and format of the executive summary. Deciding which information is most vital in the full report, and rewriting and reformatting that information into an executive summary takes time. Condensing 50 pages of a final report into a two-page summary can be a challenge! As mentioned earlier, sometimes you can create an executive summary by cutting and pasting from the original report, but you must also allow time for reworking some of the content to create smooth transitions from one idea to the next. The longer the full report is, the more time it will take to summarize it.

■ **Once the final report has been developed, if possible, create and disseminate an executive summary while the full report is in final production.**

In many cases, the distribution of executive summaries need not be held until the final versions of full reports are ready. This approach gives one solution to the length of time it often takes to produce comprehensive reports. An executive summary can be developed and distributed immediately after the content of the final report has been finalized but before the report itself is ready for distribution. This strategy can reduce the time before stakeholders and other audiences receive findings.

■ **Include the executive summary at the front of the final report to reach those evaluation audiences who might not read the entire report.**

Many more persons intend to read final evaluation reports than actually do. A likely circumstance is that they begin to read the report but, because of its length and other competing priorities, do not get around to finishing it. These persons may be key audiences for the report who, as a result, are left with an incomplete sense of what the evaluation produced. Providing the executive summary with the final report gives the reader an opportunity to at least get through this shorter version. There is the risk, of course, that including the executive summary will entice some recipients to read only the summary, and not the full report. This strategy, however, gives readers a choice and provides them with the executive summary that they may wish to copy and share with others not on the original distribution list of either version of the report.

CAUTION FOR EXECUTIVE SUMMARIES

■ **Summaries can be misused or misinterpreted by audiences who have limited contact with the program and/or evaluation.**

The difficulties with creating a coherent and concise executive summary multiply when one considers the possible use and misuse of the information. At issue is the extent to which information in the summary has been oversimplified. If you have limited contact with the various audiences who receive the summary, clarity is key. In these situations, there may be few, if any, opportunities for questions, elaboration, or discussion. The danger here is that audiences can easily misuse a summary, especially in instances where it largely contains findings and recommendations or is distributed through the media or to diverse audiences. Because the summary cannot focus on all the key descriptive or contextual pieces of the longer document, some information that may be vital to a thorough understanding of the evaluation or the program or organization is left out. When audiences unfamiliar with, or perhaps even hostile to, the program or the organization receive a summary, they may misconstrue or misinterpret the information.

Newsletters, Bulletins, Briefs, and Brochures

Newsletter, bulletins, briefs, and brochures are convenient publication types for relaying evaluation information and findings to a broad group of stakeholders and audiences. These formats are particularly well suited for reporting news about an evaluation, and presenting both interim and final evaluation findings. They can help keep channels of communication open between the stakeholders and the evaluator(s) and promote conversation among program participants as evaluation findings emerge. Newsletters, bulletins, briefs, and brochures that contain evaluation information are typically created and disseminated by organizations that

- House the evaluand
- House the evaluator(s)
- Fund the evaluand or the evaluation
- Support the evaluand and/or
- Support the development of the evaluation profession.

For example, the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee developed the brochure campaign described in Case Example 3.7 for their youth

development program. This collection of printed materials combines information about the program's mission, current activities, clients, and volunteer and fund-raising information, in addition to program evaluation findings.

CASE EXAMPLE 3.7

Brochure to Report Program Information and
Evaluation Findings to Diverse Audiences

The Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee (B&GCGM) is committed to learning what impact its programming has on the central-city youth it serves. A full-time staff member directs its evaluation program, which includes three longitudinal studies (two national, one local) and ongoing annual program eval-uation activities.

The agency's staff and board of directors agree that in order to provide the best possible services for Club participants, the agency must understand its effects and then work to continually strengthen its programming. Equally impor-tant is sharing evaluation findings with its stakeholders—first, to raise commu-nity awareness of what the agency does; second, to appeal to past, present, and future agency supporters; and third, to recruit program participants. The chal-lenge is to summarize findings in a succinct and interesting way for diverse audiences in a low-cost manner. Target audiences include the general public, donors, volunteers, and program participants.

To do this the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee has developed a series of brochures and other printed materials (annual reports, fact sheets, envelopes, donation tags, posters, and table tents). The brochures use a common color scheme (blue, green, and white) with pictures of youth of a variety of ages and ethnicities, both male and female. The images used in all of the materials are actual clients (photos taken with permission), not stock photography. The graphics are crisp and clear, with one to three photos per brochure. Simple typeface draws attention to focused information. The primary brochure, a tri-fold format (8.5″ tall and 3.75″ wide), provides bulleted information in three content areas. "Who We Are" and "What We Do" describes the agency's programs, clients, and activities. "How We Change Lives" reports on program outcomes and evaluation findings, e.g., impact on school attendance/retention, academic achievement, and reducing involve-ment in high-risk behaviors. "How You Can Help" describes volunteer and dona-tion opportunities. Two additional printed items are single-page, double-sided brochure inserts. These are formatted to be inserted into the primary brochure or accompany other program materials. The first of the two details "Club Results" such as the agency's impact on clients. Inserts provide a format to disseminate the most recent or targeted findings with a brochure. The second brochure insert provides "Club Facts" such as program history and client demographics.

(Continued)

CASE EXAMPLE 3.7 (Continued)

Ancillary printed materials (e.g., snowflake donation tags, posters, and table tents) used in a fund and awareness development campaign in 2003 were designed to coordinate with the primary brochure and insert materials. The organization's average individual financial supporter is 45 years of age or older. This campaign was specifically designed to appeal to adults between the ages of 25 and 45. Rather than hosting an event (at cost to the agency) that would appeal to this audience, the materials were designed for use in places where the target group socializes, thereby minimizing the costs of the campaign. These printed materials were designed in the style of point-of-purchase displays and were placed at local pubs and restaurants during the month of December. Patrons learned about the organization's mission, programs, and impact primarily through these table tents, posters, and brochures. Patrons had the option to purchase a snowflake that also explained program impacts. The purchased snowflakes were displayed on the wall of the establishment with the name of the donor.

SOURCE: Case described with permission of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee.

Many organizations that conduct evaluations disseminate newsletters with information about their evaluations activities, the resources they provide, their staff, and evaluation findings. For example, the Evaluation Center of Western Michigan University (www.wmich.edu/evalctr) produces a biannual newsletter. *Perspectives* is the newsletter of TCC Group (www.tccgrp.com), a consulting firm that develops strategies and programs to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of nonprofit organizations, philanthropies, and corporate citizenship programs.

The newsletter excerpt shown in Figure 3.6 is from *Community Matters,* produced biannually by the Pew Partnership for Civic Change to update audiences on their programs and strategies. The Partnership funds both programs and evaluations.

Case Example 3.8 describes *The Evaluation Exchange,* a newsletter produced by the Harvard Family Research Project (www.hfrp.org). This newsletter disseminates information about evaluation practice to diverse audiences of evaluators, researchers, community-based organizations, policy makers, and other constituencies.

CASE EXAMPLE 3.8

Newsletter Used to Disseminate Information About Evaluation Practice to Diverse Audiences

Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP), founded in 1983 and affiliated with the Harvard University Graduate School of Education, promotes the educational and social success and well-being of children, families, and their communities. HFRP helps programs and policies working with these groups to be more effective through its research, evaluation, training, and technical assistance.

As part of its evaluation and accountability services, HFRP publishes a periodical, *The Evaluation Exchange,* which serves as a forum for the exchange of ideas, lessons, and practices about the evaluation of programs and policies affecting children, youth, families, and communities. *The Evaluation Exchange*'s accessible style and format, combined with content that highlights innovative methods and practical theory, make it a unique resource for diverse evaluation stakeholders who want to learn about and share complex information efficiently. Articles are written by both well-known and lesser-known authors who are selected for their varying perspectives and voices. Regular features include Theory & Practice, Promising Practices, Evaluations to Watch, Questions & Answers, and Ask the Expert. It is published four times per year and is distributed internationally to policy makers, program practitioners, educators, researchers, evaluators, funders, and other constituencies. The subscription is free, and subscribers can opt to receive it in the mail or receive an e-mail notifying them when it is available online on the HFRP Web site. Illustrations 1 and 2, on the following pages, show the cover page and an example of a regular feature from Volume 9, No. 2 of *The Evaluation Exchange.*

As these examples show, *newsletters* take many shapes and forms. A newsletter may be devoted solely to communicating evaluation findings from one study. Or, articles about the evaluation activities and/or findings may be included in existing internal or external newsletters, which have a broader purpose. A newsletter can be a single page containing key findings, or it can be several pages created in a newspaper format describing particular elements of the evaluation and its findings.

Generally, *bulletins* are brief news statements about some matter of concern. They may look similar to one-page newsletters but are typically characterized by their sole dedication to reporting research and evaluation findings, and the frequency of their publication during the evaluation. Once the study or project has been completed, bulletins are often discontinued, only to start up again when a new study begins.

the **evaluation exchange**

A PERIODICAL ON EMERGING STRATEGIES IN EVALUATING CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

from the **director's desk**

Heather Weiss

Twenty years ago the release of *A Nation at Risk*[1] created a sense of urgency to address the mediocrity of the U.S. education system. It set off a wave of reforms that have become part of the educational landscape today—notably the drive toward high academic standards, the improvement of the teaching profession, and the extension of learning opportunities beyond traditional institutions. While there is disagreement about the strategies to reform a decentralized educational system, few would contest the need for long-term research and ongoing evaluation to determine which reforms are successful, for whom, and under what conditions.

In this issue of *The Evaluation Exchange* we consider multiple perspectives on current education reform efforts and their evaluation. The implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act drives many of the current themes in the practice and evaluation of education reform. The emphasis on scientifically based research (SBR) and experimental research as the gold standard of education scholarship is a watershed for evaluation. In the Special Report in this issue, expert researchers and evaluators comment on the opportunities and challenges that SBR presents.

The increased emphasis on using evidence to inform education practice also carries implications for schools of education to prepare future educators, researchers, and evaluators with solid research skills and a broad conception of what constitutes good educational scholarship. As several authors in this issue note, this conception includes training in and use of multiple and mixed methods because of the richer understanding that they yield.

Yet education reform proceeds at different levels, and its complex demands call not just for the participation of universities and federal- and state-level education administrations. This issue highlights the role of youth, families, communities, and the broader public in education reform as they too have a vested interest in high-performing schools.

Parents, for example, are participating in new ways in school reform, networking with other parents, and developing leadership skills that allow them to influence critical education issues. Yet in order to effect change and hold schools accountable, parents and the broader public must be educated about the standards-based movement and other education reforms. Otherwise, the public actually may be part of the philosophical resistance to efforts such as standards, as Wendy Puriefoy of Public Education Network points out in Questions and Answers.

The placement of multiple stakeholders and research rigor in the center of conversations on education reform requires a rethinking of methods for evaluating such reform. This issue provides information about several evaluations in key areas of education reform, such as technology in education, comprehensive school-based reform, and reducing the achievement gap. Evaluators share insights on their experiences of participatory action research, formative evaluation, quasi-experimental designs, and large-scale impact studies.

The world of education reform is complex and evolving and certainly not possible to cover comprehensively in one issue. As always we welcome your thoughts and contributions.

Heather

Heather B. Weiss, Ed.D.
Founder & Director
Harvard Family Research Project

[1] The National Commission on Excellence in Education. (1983). *A nation at risk: The imperative for educational reform*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

in this issue

*Evaluating
Education Reform*

Illustration 1 Newsletter Cover Page Example

> evaluations to watch

Flexibility and Feedback in a Formative Evaluation

Marjorie Weschler of SRI and Jane David of the Bay Area Research Group describe the importance of flexibility and feedback in conducting formative evaluation.

How do you evaluate a reform agenda that is constantly adapting to changing circumstances and feedback? That is the challenge we face as formative evaluators for the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative (BASRC). Created in 1995 in response to the Hewlett-Annenberg Challenge,[1] BASRC is a San Francisco-based reform organization dedicated to improving student achievement and closing the achievement gap. Schools and districts receiving BASRC funds participate in regional networking opportunities and inquiry-focused activities around teacher practices, equity, assessment, and leadership. The cornerstone of BASRC is inquiry- and data-driven decision making—not just for its grantees, but for itself. Accordingly, BASRC contracted with the Bay Area Research Group and SRI International to conduct a formative evaluation to help increase its effectiveness.

Given BASRC's learning stance and the developmental nature of its work, the goal of our formative evaluation is to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of its organizational learning. Ironically, it is BASRC's learning stance that complicates our task, because as BASRC learns, it adopts new strategies for supporting reform. With the launch of its second five-year funding period in 2001, BASRC changed from focusing on individual schools to providing support for collaboratives of schools and their districts. In 2002 BASRC again shifted its emphasis, providing comprehensive support to five districts and lighter support for school collaboratives in other districts.

Asking the Right Questions

Our research questions not only get at the heart of our formative task, but also remain pertinent in a changing environment. The following overarching questions guide our work: To what extent are BASRC's strategies to promote and support reform effective? How might they become more effective, through either modifying or better implementing the current strategies? For each of BASRC's primary strategies, we gather data to answer three questions:

1. Is the intent of the strategy clear to BASRC staff and to the field?
2. Is the implementation of the strategy consistent with its intent?
3. Does the strategy contribute constructively to the progress of reform in schools and districts?

Each question includes an implied "why or why not," from which we draw inferences about how strategies might be better designed, targeted, or strengthened in practice. These questions are applicable to any new strategies implemented.

[1] In 1995, the Hewlett-Annenberg Challenge was established for public school renewal in the San Francisco Bay area's six counties. The five-year $100 million grant has been supported by William R. Hewlett, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Annenberg Foundation, and matching local funds.

Being Flexible and Responsive

Because BASRC's reform effort is complex and is coupled with a serious attempt to learn along the way and adjust accordingly, plans never roll out exactly as expected. As BASRC adjusts to feedback from the field directly and from us, its plans and strategies change. Our evaluation tasks must change accordingly. For example, when BASRC's focus on creating collaboratives of schools shifted to concentrating attention on both schools and central offices in fewer districts, our emphasis shifted as well.

Timely Feedback

BASRC develops its annual strategic plan for the following academic year while it is still implementing the plan for the current year. Our feedback must correspond with BASRC's planning and decision-making cycles. Therefore, an end-of-year report is not sufficient. BASRC also needs just-in-time feedback so it does not waste time or resources on failing strategies and builds on success.

Continual Feedback

We provide feedback in multiple ways throughout the year, including brief memos and occasional reports summarizing data collected from grantees, "real-time" feedback during events, and frequent email and conversations with staff in response to observations or questions. We meet regularly with planning groups and with management teams to present findings, hear reactions to our interpretations, discuss strategies, and solicit their questions to guide subsequent inquiries. Such an approach encourages staff to think about what their next steps will be. The key to making feedback useful is to ensure that there is a mechanism for translating the results into actions.

Our guiding questions and flexible stance have enabled us to provide constructive feedback to BASRC. Some of our influence is tangible. For example, our recommendations contributed to BASRC's decision to differentiate training for experienced and novice reform coaches who help schools implement inquiry-based practices. Often our influence is subtler. For example, we may steer thinking in a different direction by the questions we raise, or provide validation to support a decision. Either way, our task as formative evaluators is to focus on BASRC's strategies and actions that are amenable to feedback and improvement, and to direct our energies and BASRC's attention to the areas where changes will have the biggest impact on its grantees.

For more information visit SRI's website at: www.sri.com/policy/cep/edreform/BASRC.htm.

Marjorie E. Wechsler
Education Policy Analyst
SRI International
333 Ravenswood Ave.
Menlo Park, CA 94025
Tel: 650-859-4822
Email: marjorie.wechsler
@sri.com

Jane L. David
Director
Bay Area Research Group
3144 David Ave.
Palo Alto, CA 94303
Tel: 650-493-4425
Email: jld@bayarearesearch.org

Illustration 2 Newsletter Feature Example

SOURCE: Case described and illustrations used with permission of the Harvard Family Research Project, Harvard University.

Although the distinction is not absolutely clear, *briefs* tend to be longer than bulletins. They are also typically dedicated to research and evaluation findings on a single topic, which is likely to be addressed from the perspective of multiple and/or longitudinal studies. Most often briefs address national and international policy issues. They can be of almost any length, but often tend to be from two to ten pages. They sometimes include photographs, and more than other publications, may be written in an academic style. A few examples from among the numerous organizations that produce periodic single-topic briefs are:

- The National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST, www.cse.ucla.edu)
- Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL, www.mcrel.org)
- Research Institute on Secondary Education Reform for Youth With Disabilities (RISER, www.wcer.wisc.edu/riser)
- United States Agency for International Development (USAID, www.usaid.gov)
- International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD, www.ifad.org)

Brochures typically are intended to generate interest and some follow-up on the part of readers. This might be to find out more about a program, an organization, and/or an evaluation. A typical brochure is printed on 8.5 by 11-inch paper and folded twice along the 8.5-inch side to create six panels (front and back). Often, as described in Case Example 3.7, organizations use brochures to stimulate interest or enrollment in a program and include evaluation findings to describe its benefits.

Brochures that focus solely on an evaluation can be used to invite audiences to a verbal presentation and strategic planning session, or to inform them of the study's findings. Brochures can focus solely on recommendations, lessons learned, or best practices that have been derived from evaluation studies.

Today's inexpensive desktop publishing software has dramatically increased the ease with which newsletters, bulletins, briefs, and brochures can be created. In general, newsletters and brochures are more likely to include photographs and other visuals—and require greater graphic design skill—than bulletins and briefs. You may choose to create any of these publication types yourself using word-processing or other software that contains design templates. You may also choose to engage professional services for creating newsletters and brochures, in particular. The following sets of guidelines for brochures and newsletters can be used to support your own work, or to review work you have commissioned.

Guidelines for Creating Newsletters and Brochures

- Select the data, graphics, and other information to be presented, keeping in mind that your goal is to make the content interesting for the intended audience(s) with attractive formatting and well-organized information.
- Collect brochures and newsletters from other organizations. Decide what you like or dislike about the formatting of these. Diagram a sample layout for your own newsletter or brochure.
- Make sure that each section, while concise, has a clear beginning, middle, and end.
- Use no more than two or three typefaces.
- Verify that all facts listed are accurate.
- Keep records that document the sources of all evaluation findings presented.
- Use colors, background, and text that are clear and easy to read.
- Make sure graphics are used consistently, contribute to the overall flow of information, and do not clutter or confuse the reader.
- Proofread the material carefully before going to press. (It is always best to have someone other than the author of the material proofread.)
- Select paper color that is not too bright or too dark. Matte finish reduces glare for the reader.
- Include contact information.
- Reference other published evaluation documents, including URLs if appropriate.
- If reprinting material from other publications, be sure to clear permissions from the sources.

Particular to Newsletters

- Decide on a name (or masthead), format, and frequency of distribution for your newsletter; retain the same format for each publication.
- Decide on an optimum size for the newsletter and word count per article. Brevity and clarity are always a winning combination.
- Make article titles descriptive of content; there should be a headline for every article.
- Be creative with your use of boldface, capitalization, and underlining with any text, particularly for time-sensitive information.
- Include a table of contents to help your readers find the information they need quickly.

(Continued)

(Continued)

Particular to Brochures

- Think about your primary audience(s) and design the front cover to grab their attention and get them to want to open the brochure.
- Consider spreading copy across all three inside panels rather than sticking to the three-column format.
- Avoid being too wordy; leave some white space. Use short sentences, short paragraphs, and clear visuals.
- Limit your use of boldface, capitalization, and underlining.

Implementation Tips for Newsletters, Bulletins, Briefs, and Brochures

■ **Determine the type of publication best suited for your purpose and audience(s).**

Consider the following factors when deciding whether to use a newsletter, bulletin, brief, or brochure

- Purpose of the publication
- Audience interest
- Access to audience
- Amount of information you wish to convey
- Other existing or planned publications
- Time and financial resources available
- Overall scope of the dissemination effort

If your purpose is to inform the evaluation audiences of the study's findings or create interest in the program or evaluation process, using a newsletter, bulletin, brief, or brochure will increase the scope of the dissemination effort. Note that evaluations which draw primarily on qualitative data (yielding rich descriptions and verbatim quotes, and where the evaluation context is critical to interpreting the results) may not be appropriate for communicating through newsletters, bulletins, and brochures because of their limited length.

■ **Maximize your use of space, while providing sufficient detail to support the publication's purpose.**

An important decision, and a difficult one, is deciding what to include in and leave out of the document. Questions you might ask yourself include the following:

- Is it important to provide information about the evaluation's design and implementation?
- Which findings should be reported?
- Should it include graphics (e.g. photos, tables, figures, etc.)?
- What about alternative viewpoints?
- Should recommendations be included?

With the limited space of newsletters and bulletins, and for briefs and brochures, in particular, the answers to these questions are essential. For additional information about content, refer to the guidelines earlier in this chapter on writing, and on the use of tables and graphs.

■ **Determine the resources required and frequency of publication.**

The major advantage of using newsletters and brochures in particular is their visual appeal. It is important to create attractive, eye-catching documents. Whether you use professional services or in-house personnel skilled at using desktop publishing programs, producing newsletters, bulletins, briefs, and brochures also requires (1) staff to coordinate the publication's development and (2) resources to print, copy, and distribute these documents to the intended audiences.

Whatever publication type you choose, you must also decide how often it should be published and disseminated. The purpose of the publication and resources available will influence this decision. The time period and nature of the evaluation—whether it is formative or summative—are other factors to consider.

■ **Develop a project management plan to ensure timely and efficient production.**

To ensure that the documents are produced when they are needed, it is a good idea to develop a management plan. The plan should specify the various tasks, timelines, and people involved in developing the publication and the dissemination strategy.

■ **Consider posting newsletters, bulletins, and briefs on the Web.**

You will find that most organizations post their newsletters, bulletins, and briefs on the Web, while at the same time disseminating paper copies. These documents can easily be converted to portable document format (.pdf), posted on the Web, and then downloaded by audiences. Since brochures are more difficult for Web users to reproduce in their original form, these tend not to get posted on Web sites. (For more information on Web communications, refer to the section at the end of this chapter.)

CAUTIONS FOR NEWSLETTERS, BULLETINS, BRIEFS, AND BROCHURES

■ **Once evaluation findings have become available, organizations may make decisions about including them in short publications without consulting the evaluator.**

Many programs and organizations will want to include evaluation findings in their promotional materials, particularly to the extent that the findings are favorable. Even if you have offered to provide consultation about how best to accurately represent the findings in a newsletter or brochure, you may not always be given the opportunity. Different personnel than those who worked with you on the evaluation often develop the organization's publications, and frequently this function is outsourced entirely.

■ **Audiences may overlook newsletters, bulletins, briefs, and brochures.**

The value different audiences place on newsletters, bulletins, briefs, and brochures affects their credibility and usefulness. Despite your best efforts to align these publications with audience interests, needs, and access, they may pay little attention to them, or overlook them entirely as junk mail.

News Media Communications

In many evaluations, the findings need to be disseminated beyond the primary stakeholders. In these cases, using the news media to communicate and report evaluation findings helps reach the general public as well as specific industry or professional groups. It also has the potential for facilitating discussion among outside groups affected by or interested in the evaluation results. Some of these groups may include influential opinion and policy makers.

The two kinds of broad-based media are *mass* and *specialized* media. The general public is the audience for *mass media,* namely print (newspapers) and electronic media (e.g., television, radio, the Internet). Examples are publications such as *The New York Times, Time* magazine, *The Wall Street Journal,* and local newspapers. In addition, community and ethnic media that publish local weeklies or biweeklies for particular neighborhoods, or targeted populations, can be an effective means for disseminating evaluation information and findings to various audiences.

Evaluation results may find their way into mass media through three established routes. First, newspaper writers may obtain copies of evaluation reports from one of the stakeholder groups and write an article based on the report. A second method involves the newspaper writer interviewing the evaluator and possibly the program staff and participants. From these interviews, the reporter writes an article.

The third method is the press or news release. An evaluator and/or primary stakeholders may contact a reporter by phone and provide evaluation information. On the more formal side, a written press release is produced. This is typically a one- to two-page summary of the evaluation's findings sent to both print and electronic media. If the press release is brief and written like a news story, it may be published as is, or it may be excerpted. If the release creates enough interest in the topic, a reporter may call the evaluator for an in-depth interview. Figure 3.29 shows a three-page press release used to report research findings.

Notice how the text of the press release in Figure 3.29 reflects several of the following guidelines for press releases:

Guidelines for Press Releases

- Use clear language the general public will understand—avoid jargon.
- Begin the press release with a statement that sparks the interest of reporters. This is called a "lead" and is intended to grab the reader's attention.
- Use the active voice.
- Use short paragraphs.
- Use quotations to make the content more interesting.
- Print it on letterhead or on a "news release" form.
- Indicate the date on which the press is free to use the information with the words, "FOR RELEASE." If the contents' use is not date specific, use the statement, "FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE."
- Provide the name, institutional affiliation, and phone number of a contact person (typically the evaluator or the organization's public relations officer).
- Use "# # #" or "-30-" to indicate the end of the news release text.
- Target smaller newspapers, since they are more likely to print "community" news.
- Send the release to a particular person at the news agency so that it doesn't get lost in the organization.

EPSL   Education Policy Studies Laboratory
             Education Policy Research Unit

****NEWS RELEASE****
From the Education Policy Research Unit (EPRU) and the
Education Policy Studies Laboratory (EPSL)
at Arizona State University

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Saturday, December 28, 2002

CONTACT:
Audrey L. Amrein
ASU Research Professional
amrein@asu.edu

David C. Berliner
Regents' Professor, College of Education
(480) 965-3921
Berliner@asu.edu

Alex Molnar, Director
Education Policy Studies Laboratory
(480) 965-1886
epsl@asu.edu

Find the complete text of this report at:
http://www.asu.edu/educ/epsl/EPRU/epru_2002_Research_Writing.htm

New Research Casts Doubt on Value of High-Stakes Testing to Improve School Performance

TEMPE, Ariz.— The high-stakes testing policies adopted by many states and the new annual student testing required by the federal government in the 2001 No Child Left Behind legislation may be counterproductive, according to two studies conducted by the Education Policy Studies Laboratory at Arizona State University for the Great Lakes Center for Education Research and Practice, a Michigan-based think tank.

The two reports, "The Impact of High-Stakes Tests on Student Academic Performance: An Analysis of NAEP Results in States With High-Stakes Tests and ACT, SAT, and AP Test Results in States With High School Graduation Exams" and "An Analysis of Some Unintended and Negative Consequences of High-Stakes Testing," are the first in what will be a series of annual reports on the impact of high-stakes tests.

Arizona State University researchers Audrey L. Amrein and David C. Berliner conducted both studies.

"The impact high-stakes tests and high school graduation exams have on academic achievement is, at best, ambiguous," according to Amrein. She adds: "Contrary to popular thought, high-stakes tests do not increase academic achievement. Instead, after states implement high-stakes tests, academic achievement continues to look much like it did before

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Figure 3.29   Three-Page Press Release to Report Research Findings

SOURCE: Used with permission of the Education Policy Research Unit and the Education Policy Studies Laboratory, College of Education, Arizona State University.

high-stakes tests were implemented. In addition, negative or unintended consequences emerge as students, teachers, and schools attempt to reconcile learning and the attachment of serious consequences to test performance."

According to co-author David Berliner, "The relative failure of high-stakes tests to achieve their intended purpose and their numerous negative consequences must be considered as America prepares to launch a massive testing program in the effort to improve our schools."

Impact on Student Academic Performance

"The Impact of High-Stakes Tests on Student Academic Performance" looked at data from 28 states where high-stakes testing programs are already in place. These programs include tests that students must pass in order to advance to the next grade, and graduation tests that students must pass in order to receive a high school diploma, regardless of their performance in the classroom.

Results from these states' high-stakes tests were compared with the performance of students from those states on other widely recognized measures of student achievement: the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), American College Test (ACT), Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), and Advanced Placement (AP) assessments. The study found that these measures showed no systemic evidence of improved achievement after states implemented high-stakes testing programs. States that implemented other high-stakes testing programs performed "much like the rest of the nation" on the ACT, SAT, AP, and NAEP tests, Amrein and Berliner found.

The Amrein-Berliner data also suggest that in states that implemented high-stakes graduation exams, academic achievement appeared to decline. According to Amrein and Berliner, ACT, SAT, and AP scores fell in states that implemented high-stakes graduation exams.

The Berliner-Amrein analyses suggest that, as indicated by student performance on independent measures of achievement, high-stakes tests may inhibit the academic achievement of students, not foster their academic growth.

The researchers found that when state high-stakes test scores rise, it is likely as a result of student training that focuses on taking the tests. They conclude "such training does not appear to have any meaningful carryover effect when assessment of student learning is made on the independent measures of achievement that we used."

Unintended and Negative Consequences

"An Analysis of Some Unintended and Negative Consequences of High-Stakes Testing" examined the unintended consequences of high-stakes tests in 16 states that have implemented high-stakes graduation exams. In those states, Amrein and Berliner found increased dropout rates, decreased graduation rates, and higher rates of younger people taking the GED equivalency exams.

Examining news reports and qualitative data, the pair also found associations between high-stakes testing and

☐ Higher rates of retention of low-performing students in years before high-stakes tests were administered, possibly to better prepare students to take high-stakes tests;
☐ Higher numbers of low-performing students being suspended before testing days, expelled from school before tests, or being reclassified as exempt from testing because they are determined to be either Special Education or Limited English Proficient (LEP)—"all strategies to prevent low-scoring students from taking high-stakes tests," the authors noted;

Figure 3.29 *(Continued)*

□ Reduced offerings in art, music, science, social studies, and physical education—all subjects that are less often tested;

□ Higher numbers of urban school teachers, in particular, "teaching to the test," limiting instruction to only those things that are sure to be tested, requiring students to spend hours memorizing facts, and drilling students on test-taking strategies;

□ Increased flight from public schools by teachers who sought to escape state testing mandates, "because state rules make them feel compromised as professionals," according to Amrein and Berliner;

□ Instances of cheating by teachers and other school employees under pressure by high-stakes testing programs.

Amrein and Berliner conclude that there are enough negative unintended consequences to call into question the value of high-stakes high school graduation exams. Their data indicate that it is quite possible that the adverse consequences of high-stakes tests outweigh the benefits that advocates claim for them.

The Education Policy Research Unit (EPRU) conducts original research, provides independent analyses of research and policy documents, and facilitates educational innovation. EPRU facilitates the work of leading academic experts in a variety of disciplines to help inform the public debate about education policy issues.

Visit the EPRU Web site at http://educationanalysis.org

The Education Policy Studies Laboratory (EPSL) at Arizona State University offers high-quality analyses of national education policy issues and provides an analytical resource for educators, journalists, and citizens. It includes the Commercialism in Education Research Unit (CERU), the Education Policy Analysis Archives (EPAA), the Education Policy Reports Project (EPRP), the Education Policy Research Unit (EPRU), and the Language Policy Research Unit (LPRU).

The EPSL is directed by ASU Professor Alex Molnar.

Visit the EPSL Web site at http://edpolicylab.org

Figure 3.29 *(Continued)*

There are several benefits to using the print media. First, people may tend to have more confidence in what they read than in what they hear. Second, this medium can act as a reference. If people miss details the first time they read the document, in many cases they can easily refer to the paper again to gain a better understanding. A newspaper can also repeat information in successive editions to make a point and provide additional details or new interpretations of previously reported news. Finally, a newspaper's ability to reach a large audience is often the major reason for using this method.

Television and radio are mass electronic media that include cable news, network television, and news radio. These media are also well

suited to reaching large segments of the public. Like videotape presentations, they can

- Transmit evaluation findings using language, sight, and sound
- Feature program participants
- Use spoken and visual language to reinforce the message
- Inspire and motivate audience

The *specialized media*, which are more trade and interest group oriented, offer evaluators an effective means for communicating evaluation findings. Newsletters, journals, and magazines published by groups such as the American Hospital Association, American Evaluation Association, or American Association of Retired Persons report information that is of greatest interest to their constituents. (For more information on the use of newsletters, see the previous section in this chapter.) These kinds of organizations and associations often post their newsletters on the Internet, increasing their accessibility to stakeholders and other audiences.

Although the news media can contribute greatly to evaluators' efforts to disseminate evaluation findings, they can be unpredictable. There are no guarantees of what information will be disseminated on the page, screen, or air because much of what the evaluator conveys will be abbreviated due to space and time restrictions. Evaluators wishing to use the media should do so only after careful thought and planning.

Implementation Tips for News Media Communications

■ **Involve primary stakeholders in the media strategy as much as possible, especially if they are taking action on the findings.**

Become informed about primary stakeholders' past experiences with the media. It is a good idea to benefit from these experiences and use them to the evaluation's advantage. Together you may decide that a press conference is preferable to a news release, or that an interview on a local public broadcasting station is more effective than an interview with the local newspaper. The decision to involve the media should always be done collaboratively. Case Example 3.9 illustrates how two school districts and program evaluators worked with the local newspaper to disseminate their evaluation results, raising the awareness level of the community and increasing dialogue about the two districts' consolidation plans.

CASE EXAMPLE 3.9

Establishing Linkages With the Local Media

An evaluation team studying the consolidation of two school districts in central Illinois published the evaluation's executive summary as an addendum to the local newspaper. It included a note "To Our Readers," which read,

> The future prosperity of Central Illinois and the superior quality of life which we enjoy is, in large measure, directly related to the stability and the excellence of our school systems, particularly at the primary and secondary levels. For this reason and as a public service, we have reproduced the Executive Summary of the recently conducted study of these two systems. We hope you will find it informative, that you will read it carefully, and that you will retain it for future reference.

The newspaper, of traditional size and printed on typical newsprint, included a table of contents and was created using two columns per page. Interspersed with the text were various tables and charts describing the evaluation's results. The 30-page executive summary resulted in an 8-page newspaper. As a follow-up to the newsletter, several public forums with school board members, super-intendents, school personnel, community members, and the evaluators were held. At the meetings, questions and concerns about the findings were discussed. The evaluators believe that the newsletter and public meetings served to raise community members' awareness and increased discussion and exchange of ideas about the two districts' consolidation plans.

SOURCE: Case described with permission of North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, Oak Brook, Illinois.

■ **Contact the media only after primary stakeholders have had a chance to read and reflect on the evaluation findings.**

It is important that primary stakeholders have time to consider evaluation findings before responding to the media's questions. No one likes to be sur-prised by reading about his or her program or organization in the press. Decision makers need time to develop a thoughtful response to findings.

■ **Enlist the aid of a journalist or someone who has a media communica-tions background.**

Public relations firms and consultants are a resource evaluators can use when working with the media. Someone with a print media background can be particularly helpful in determining what information should be printed,

and how it might be formatted so that the general readership of the paper can assimilate the information.

■ **Be available to the media. Cooperation will improve media access and fair treatment in the future.**

A sure way to lose the media's interest is to be difficult to reach. Although you do not need to say much if you are concerned about divulging too much information too soon, being accessible shows an interest and concern for disseminating the study's results. Provide reporters with phone numbers and addresses so they can reach the evaluator or other spokesperson. If the media believe you are interested in working with them, they are also more likely to be interested in learning about a study. As a result, they may provide more airtime or space in their reports.

■ **Have a good summary of the evaluation study prepared to provide to reporters.**

It is rare that media personnel have enough time (or perhaps interest) to wade through lengthy reports. Their interest is primarily in the "facts" and key findings of the evaluation study. If you provide them with too much information, they may choose to report less important findings, thus increasing the potential for the results to be misinterpreted or misused. Sometimes an executive summary provides the right balance between too much and too little information.

■ **Be selective in choosing reports to send to the media.**

The press does not print everything it receives. It is important to determine with the project's stakeholders what information should be made available to the public. If the evaluation team sends everything, the press may choose pieces that are not particularly representative of the key aspects of the study. Do not rely on reporters to know which studies, findings, or parts of the evaluation are most important to communicate.

■ **Learn the language of the media and what it means to be "on" or "off the record."**

Before talking with reporters, know what it means to go on the record, or to be cited in the article. Many evaluators have learned the hard way that what they thought was an "aside" ended up being a major headline. Some reporters may wish you to say more even if you do not have data or findings in hand. When working with the news media, you should consider what you are and are not willing to share. It is wise to assume that when speaking with a reporter, everything is on the record.

CASE EXAMPLE 3.10

Challenges of Using the Local Media

This case concerns the evaluation of a school's first year of educational reform. Three months after the evaluation began, the education writer of one of the local newspapers spent several hours at the school interviewing students, teachers, and the paraprofessional staff. She had also contacted two or three students' parents or guardians. In the early afternoon, while the evaluator was doing her usual observing, the reporter asked if it would be all right to interview her for about 30 minutes. Naive to the workings of the press, she pleasantly agreed to be interviewed. The reporter asked several questions, mostly focusing on how well the school was doing after the first three months (something like the United States president's first 100 days). The evaluator described some of the successes and challenges the school faced, but distinctly remembers being fairly upbeat about the school's progress. Although she did notice that the reporter took only a couple of notes in a small notepad, she had left the interview feeling good about the information she'd shared. That is, she didn't believe any of it was anything the teachers at the school didn't already know.

A few days later, on the front page of the local section of the newspaper was the article about the school. The headline read: "School rates a C+." The article was a negative portrayal of the school and its teachers. There was little of the positive information shared by the evaluator, and several things she had said were taken out of context. The information provided wasn't wrong, but it wasn't reported in the way the evaluator had presented it. The evaluator also strongly objected to the summative rating of the school, which she had not suggested. This, she was later told, was the copywriter's addition.

After this episode, the evaluator was invited to be interviewed several times over the course of the three years. She politely declined and recommended that the reporters read the formative evaluation reports when they were delivered. Later articles written by the same reporter were consistently negative about the school. The reporter most likely did read parts of the evaluation reports, but most in the school believed her agenda was singular in purpose. Comments from parents who withdrew their children from the school during the first two years of its implementation indicated that they had believed what the reporter had communicated about the school and therefore did not want to "risk their child's education to an experiment." Later, as these parents learned more about the school from other sources, some regretted having removed their children. They realized too late that they didn't have the whole story. In retrospect, the evaluator wishes she had not been so forthcoming in her remarks and that she had been more cautious in the words she used. At the same time, it is quite possible that the reporter would have written the same story even without the evaluator's interview.

■ **Deal in facts, and avoid any temptation to lie to a reporter.**

Be honest and forthright, but do not feel you have to answer every question. For some questions, you may wish to confer with the primary stakeholders and get back to the reporter at a later time. For others, you may explain that the data have not been sufficiently analyzed to draw any conclusions. Avoid any temptation to lie to a reporter in an effort to deal with questions you would rather not answer.

■ **Avoid reporters who appear to have a single agenda and may fail to represent the evaluation's findings accurately.**

Some reporters, for various reasons, are out to prove a hunch or theory. Be wary of reporters who are only interested in the evaluation findings to support their assertions. The results could be disastrous. If you find yourself in this position, it is wise to discuss a strategy with the primary stakeholders. If this is not possible, then be available to the reporters (don't hide), but plan what you will say, and say no more. Case Example 3.10 describes an evaluator who faced this challenge and unfortunately learned too late the need for carefully assessing a reporter's intent.

CAUTIONS FOR NEWS MEDIA COMMUNICATIONS

■ **The news media may not be an appropriate medium for communicating formative evaluation findings.**

As the school's evaluator discovered in Case Example 3.10, the formative report immediately became summative when it was provided to the press. Those reading the newspaper saw the article as a definitive assessment of the school instead of describing it as a work in progress. The news media may be a more suitable reporting format for summative evaluations where it is appropriate to communicate a conclusive result or decision.

■ **Reports via news media usually must be kept short.**

When using television, radio, and the press, you are forced to keep your format short due to severe space and time restrictions. Thus, the information conveyed must be limited to a few key findings. For evaluations where the program's context is critical to understanding the evaluation findings, these media may not be your first choice.

Print media, television, and radio are one-way communication systems. That is, none allow audience members to ask questions, get more

details, or engage in any discussion about the findings. The fact that people tend to listen to radio or television somewhat casually, tuning in and out of a broadcast, is a further limitation of this approach.

■ **The news media tend to focus on the negative or on failures, especially concerning government or other public agencies and organizations.**

Reporters do not always report evaluation findings in the tone or manner expressed by the interviewees. Their job is to sell papers or to increase their audience. Though hard to accept, bad news sells. Thus, if an evaluation report identifies several areas of concern or makes significant recommendations for improvement, it is likely that a newspaper article will focus on the program's problems, failures, or weaknesses, rather than on the things that are positive and are working well. In cases such as these, a different communicating and reporting method might be more useful and appropriate.

Web Site Communications

A Web site is a location on the World Wide Web with information about a topic, an organization, an individual, or products (www.ucla.edu/articles/comm_websites.htm). The possibilities for evaluation communicating and reporting via Web sites are numerous. Possible Web postings include

- Interim and final evaluation reports
- Video presentations
- PowerPoint presentations
- Newsletters and brochures
- Meeting schedules and agendas
- Press releases and other forms of media coverage, including video clips from news broadcasts

Figure 3.30 shows two pages from the Web site of The Evaluation Center at Western Michigan University (www.wmich.edu/evalctr). The first is their introductory page for "The Advanced Technological Education (ATE) Program Evaluation Project." Selecting the link for "Evaluation Products" (fourth item in left column) takes you to the second page, which shows the variety of items available—including reports, executive summaries, at-a-glance summaries, brochures, PowerPoint presentations, descriptions of the program; and the evaluation approach, evaluation staff, and advisory panel members. Finally, the page names a specific person to e-mail with questions and comments. (To see this figure in color, go to http://www.sagepub.com/escr.)

Figure 3.30   Example of Home Page and Evaluation Products Page for a Single Project

SOURCE: Used with permission of The Evaluation Center, Western Michigan University.

Figure 3.30 *(Continued)*

Web postings of evaluation products have several advantages:

- The evaluation information can be made easily accessible to a very broad national and international audience at minimal cost.
- Web sites allow you to stage the presentation of information into sections, accessible to users through links that the user selects. Links to related information and resources can also be included on the Web site, increasing users' access to knowledge, organizations, and contacts that may be especially useful to them.
- Dissemination through the Web allows large document files to be sectioned, and reduces the download times required when the document is transmitted in one piece via e-mail attachments.
- Because software to open the Web attachments is usually made available at the Web site (e.g., Adobe Acrobat), users do not face problems they sometimes have being unable to open e-mail attachments.
- Web dissemination also reduces the possibility of viruses being transmitted when documents are downloaded.

Implementation Tips for Web Communications

■ **Determine your audiences' Internet access and practices prior to establishing it as a mainstay for communicating and reporting.**

While Web use is commonplace to many, particular audiences may not have Internet access, and if they do, may not use it regularly. Also, the access they have may not support the technical features (e.g., connection speed, browser type) that your communications will require to work successfully. While most organizations and businesses have high-speed Internet connections, evaluation audiences accessing the Web from home may have a slower service, which can significantly increase access and download times.

■ **Before developing a Web site to facilitate evaluation communicating and reporting, determine if one already exists where a section could be used or created for your purposes.**

Developing and maintaining your own Web site requires both creative and financial resources. Existing Web sites of organizations or associations involved in your evaluation work may be good options for making evaluation information available. Many organizations with Web sites have in-house technical expertise to maintain and expand them. This expertise may be available to create Web pages and links to include your evaluation communications and reports.

Another option is to post evaluation documents on an FTP (file transfer protocol) site, which makes the documents available for downloading, but does not require the creation of Web pages. The site contains folders and files

that are displayed to the user, similar to the way folders and files are displayed for the hard disk of your computer. In addition, FTP sites can be password-protected. Most Web hosting servers provide the means to create FTP sites without additional costs. You may find it convenient to post working documents on an FTP site for evaluation team members to access easily.

■ **If building a Web site specifically for the evaluation, determine if you will develop it yourself or seek outside expertise.**

Relatively simple Web authoring tools are available on the Web for free and through most Internet service providers, which will also host the Web site. In addition, Web pages can be created using most word-processing software. More sophisticated authoring software may also be an option, depending upon your time, technical expertise, and budget. General guidelines for developing a Web site and creating Web pages are presented here. (More in-depth treatments are readily available on the Web and in any number of books.)

Guidelines for Developing a Web site and Creating Web Pages

- Establish the purpose of your Web site, and assemble all of the information you wish to provide.
- Develop a logical flow between introductory information and the content of subsequent pages.
- Review existing Web sites for ideas about design and organization.
- Create the Web pages to fit the width of the lowest monitor resolution the majority of your audience is likely to use.
- Maintain the same basic design across all Web pages on your site.
- Use high contrast between background color and type.
- Choose typeface to maximize readability: Make sure text is not too small. Avoid using all caps, which slows reading time.
- Make sure you use commonly available text fonts (e.g., Arial, New York Times, Helvetica, or Times New Roman). Text fonts not supported by readers' computer systems will be translated into something similar, which could be visually unappealing.
- Position headings close to the related text.
- Choose graphics wisely: Make sure they are related to your topic and will be meaningful for readers. Do not allow too many different graphics to clutter the page. Avoid graphics that require a long download time.
- Make sure your page functions (links, downloads, etc.) properly.
- Test your Web site with different browsers to make sure it appears as you intend and functions properly.

Many organizations use commercial firms and consultants to design, create, and maintain Web sites. In the long run, this may be the better option if you anticipate significant use of and frequent revisions to your Web site.

■ **Consider making your Web site and postings accessible to people with disabilities.**

In 1998, the U.S. Congress amended the Rehabilitation Act to require federal agencies to make their electronic and information technology accessible to people with disabilities (see www.section508.gov). This requires that federal agencies' Web sites (and private sector Web sites provided under contract to a federal agency) must be accessible to individuals with disabilities such as blindness, low vision, and motor and hearing impairments. Web site features that increase accessibility include

- Text labels or verbal descriptors for graphics
- Electronic forms that allow people using assistive technology (e.g., input and output devices [voice, Braille], alternate access aids [headsticks, light pointers], modified keyboards, speech recognition software) to complete and submit them
- Text-only pages, with equivalent information or functionality as pages written in HTML
- Voice enabling

These features are worth considering whether or not some of your audience members are likely to be disabled. "Accessible sites offer significant advantages that go beyond access. For example, those with 'text-only' options provide a faster downloading alternative and can facilitate transmission of Web-based data to cell phones and personal digital assistants" (www.section508.gov). Voice enabling allows employees away from their desks to use the resources of the Internet via telephone.

■ **Provide various options for accessing and downloading large evaluation documents.**

Providing options increases the accessibility of your evaluation documents to audiences with various computer and Internet technologies. One option for posting large documents on a Web site, which has the advantage of reducing download time, is to divide the document into chapters or sections and post them individually. You probably have noticed that many documents available on the Web are presented in sections to be downloaded separately. This allows users to quickly access those areas they are most interested in, without waiting for the entire document to download, and then search it. You will probably also want to include the full report as a

single posting for those who want to print it without accessing each chapter or section individually. Other options are to post documents in several formats: portable document format (.pdf), text-only format (.txt), Microsoft Word (.doc). Also, you can easily post large documents on FTP sites (see second implementation tip).

■ **Consider securing your posted documents so that they cannot be modified, and/or requiring password access.**

Unless they are created and posted as "read-only" files, it is possible for evaluation documents posted on the Web to be modified and redistributed. Parts of documents can be excerpted, and presented or used in ways you had not intended. Both Microsoft Word and Adobe Acrobat have features to prevent the modification of files posted in the formats that they support (.doc and .pdf, respectively). Doing so provides some protection. Remember, though, that anything that can be displayed via a Web site can be copied. Another option is to restrict access to the Web pages containing the documents to only those persons to whom you have provided a password.

■ **As with any means of dissemination, make sure evaluation documents, photographs, videos, and presentations posted on the Web have been fully vetted with your evaluation team, clients, and stakeholders.**

Dissemination through the World Wide Web makes many evaluation products accessible to a wider range and greater number of individuals than ever before. You will want to make your most stringent efforts to obtain feedback and assure accuracy before posting on the Internet. One particular concern is making negative evaluation findings publicly accessible. Evaluators may be reticent to fully address negative findings in reports they know are going to be made available on the Web. Stakeholders may not fully realize the implications of having negative findings widely available. Finally, consider getting formal, written permission to include in a Web posting the names, contact information, and/or visual images that are part of an evaluation document or video.

■ **Write summaries of evaluation information/findings for inclusion on Web pages, and post full versions of documents to be downloaded.**

Figure 3.31 provides an example of a Web page displaying evaluation findings with brief text, a link to the full study, and simple graphics. (To see this figure in color, go to http://www.sagepub.com/escr.) Web pages are well suited for presenting limited amounts of text rather than complete reports. Research on Web users' practices revealed that they tend to scan contents

Read Now Students Show Greater Gains in Decoding Ability Than Students Taught With State-Adopted Phonics Program
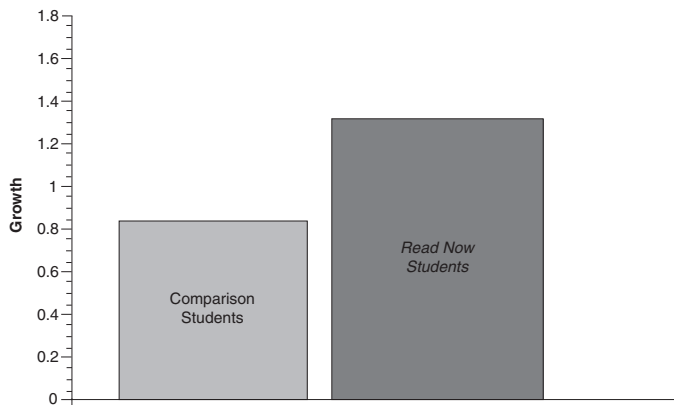
> 667 students in 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grade were tested in the fall, prior to the beginning of reading instruction, and again in the spring.

> Students who were taught for seven months using *Read Now* showed significantly greater gains in decoding than comparison students ($p < .01$, ES = .24).

> Gains equaled approximately four more months of growth in grade-equivalent scores on a popular measure of decoding.

> Comparison students were taught using state-adopted phonics materials.

For the complete evaluation report, **click here.**

Figure 3.31   Example of Web Page Displaying Evaluation Findings With Brief Text, Link to Full Study, and Simple Graphics

of Web pages rather than read them word-for-word (www.useit.com/alertbos/97). Bulleted summaries of findings are a good choice for Web page content.

■ **Consider including a mechanism for evaluation audiences to ask questions, request further information, and/or provide feedback.**

While Web postings are primarily a one-way means of disseminating evaluation information, asynchronous interaction with audiences and stakeholders

can take place if they have an opportunity to ask questions and give feedback. This can be done by providing a link to a form that users can complete, or providing contact information (e.g., e-mail address, phone). This feature should not be offered on your Web site, though, unless you have the resources to provide timely responses.

CAUTION FOR WEB COMMUNICATIONS

■ **Web site communications and reports are highly visible.**

The World Wide Web provides unprecedented means for disseminating information. Access to evaluation information made available on the Web is virtually unlimited. This makes it open to critique, feedback, and praise by anyone who sees it.

S U M M A R Y

In this chapter we have focused on evaluation strategies and formats that are primarily text based and are particularly effective for facilitating individual learning. The strategies we have described include: memos and e-mail, postcards, interim reports, final reports, executive summaries, newsletters, bulletins, briefs, and brochures, news media communications and Web site communications. Throughout the chapter we have emphasized the value of considering a communication's design and layout to enhance the accessibility of the information; the importance of using tables and figures effectively; and using clear, jargon-free language.