

9. Reporting the evaluation findings

- 9.1 Effective reporting
- 9.2 The need for a reporting plan
- 9.3 Form of reports
- 9.4 Form of the final report
- 9.5 Format of the final report

9.1 *Effective reporting*

The purpose of reporting can be twofold; to:

- aid in decision-making, and
- to provide a better understanding of the project's achievements (and areas for improvement).

Reports that are not acted upon are a tragic waste of time and resources. Reports therefore need to be:

- useful and informative
- scheduled so that they are available for use by the relevant audience(s) (teaching staff etc.) at the right time
- targeted to the particular audience (making sure they are meaningful, and relevant).

That is, reports need to be timely, action-focussed where needed, and disseminated to all those who need to know.

Above all, your report(s) must clearly *communicate* the findings to the intended audience(s). This means paying attention to report structure, method of presentation, and language style used.

9.2 *The need for a reporting plan*

A variety of reports, to a variety of audiences, will be required over the life of the project, and these need to be planned for and mapped out. The need for interim reports is raised in Section 7: 'Evaluating project processes'. Use the **Planning/Reporting Schedule** (Word) to map out all the reports that will be produced for the project.

9.3 *Form of reports*

Reports may take a variety of forms, depending on the level of formality required, intended audience and particular stage of the project. They include:

- a written report (memorandum, letter, formal report). For a typical interim report format, see Project Status Report template (Word) introduced in Section 7.
- an oral presentation or discussion at a meeting
- a combination of both an oral and written presentation

- a media release (e.g. item for *Unitas*)
- a summary item in a newsletter.

9.4 Form of the final report

A formal written report for the major stakeholder(s) would be considered mandatory. However, the evaluation team may choose to augment the written report with some other form of presentation (e.g. audio-visual, oral presentation or briefing).

Consider producing summary reports (of the final report) for release to other interested parties, or for publicity purposes.

Some other suggestions for the final report

- Customise the final report: Depending on the number of stakeholders and their interests, you may need to produce a number of reports customised to the particular audience.
- It's wise to circulate a draft version of the final report to all major stakeholders for comment and feedback. Seek their input on matters such as report format, purpose, and interpretation of results.
- Keep the key audiences informed of the progress of the evaluation and interim findings so that the final report is not a complete 'surprise'.

9.5 Format of the final report

The format that the final report will take will be dictated to some degree by the intended audience(s), the type of evaluation carried out, and the purposes/intended use of the results. However, reports will generally have most of the following sections – or at least the information therein.

1. Executive summary

This is a critical opening to the report. It should provide:

- an overview of the evaluation (the 'what' and 'why')
- the major sources of data and methods of data collection and analysis
- general results of the evaluation
- summary of recommendations
- any major limitations or constraints placed on the evaluation.

This section needs to 'capture' the reader and provide all the key information should they choose not to read any further. It's best to keep it as brief as possible (to around a single A4 page) and free of as much technical terms or jargon as possible.

2. Background of project

This might cover:

- origins of the project (e.g. in response to some perceived need)
- project goals and objectives
- staff and resources involved
- funding sources
- planned project 'deliverables' (courseware product etc.).

3. Purpose, intent and design of the evaluation study

Items here include:

- aims/objectives of the evaluation
- evaluation criteria chosen (performance measures, standards)
- key questions explored
- other design parameters – data collection and analysis methods, data sources
- staff involved.

4. Results

This section provides a description of the evaluation findings. Use graphs, tables, diagrams etc. to aid understanding and interpretation.

5. Discussion

This should include:

- interpretations of the findings in the light of project and evaluation goals
- any limitations or weaknesses in the findings, methods, data, etc. (i.e. validity issues)
- judgments against the evaluation criteria
- comment on the generalisability of the findings
- any 'unexpected' findings.

6. Costs and benefits

This is a notoriously difficult area to adequately identify and quantify. You would probably only include this section if analysis of costs and benefits was part of the evaluation plan. It would include:

- description of costs and benefits estimation procedures
- description of dollar and non-dollar costs and benefits.

7. Conclusions, recommendations and options

As important as the opening Executive summary, this section should encapsulate the outcomes of the evaluation and clearly point to appropriate actions that stem from the findings. It should include:

- overall judgments of the worth of the project
- comment on the validity and reliability of the findings on which the judgements are made
- any recommendations for change/improvement in product, process, outcomes, or application of the innovation

- any adjustments required in evaluation design should the study be replicated (lessons to be learned).

[Adapted from Morris, L. L, Taylor Fitz-Gibbon, C. J. and Freeman, M. E (1987). *How to Communicate Evaluation Findings*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.]

Activity

Transfer key data from your Planning/Reporting Schedule to the Evaluation Plan worksheet (Word) of Section 11.

University of Tasmania
Last updated: 16/1/03