

## WHO WILL USE YOUR EVALUATION?

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This is the second of a series of articles called Thinking about Evaluation. The purpose is to encourage thinking about, and the practice of, evaluation. Discussion via the gnf list-serve is encouraged!

Although the current emphasis in evaluation is on outcomes, one of the first questions to be answered when thinking about evaluating a program or project is “Who will use the evaluation?” That seemingly simple question may take some time to answer, if you go beyond your immediate response!

If you have a funded project, your first response might well be ‘the funders’. Of course, the agency or organization which funded your work will want to know what happened as a result of their investment. Perhaps their requirements were outlined in the request for proposals (rfp).

Or perhaps it is your own organization or agency that is paying for the program or project. Is there a clear expectation by your agency administrators or the director, about how the evaluation results will be used?

How do you and your co-workers, as program staff, plan to use the results of the evaluation? Will you report the results in a press release, analyze them to see how you can improve your efforts, or compare the results to work done elsewhere?

What about program participants? Would the evaluation results be useful to them? What about your agency’s advisory board or your program advisory committee? Will they have a use for the evaluation?

By now, you may be wondering, WHAT would these folks want to know about the project or program? Some of you may know, because you asked them during the planning of the project or program. They might have been involved in the planning.

While I’ve used only the term ‘results’ so far, some potential users of your evaluation may want to know something about the process and performance of the program as well as the results. Personally, I think it’s hard to judge results without knowing what happened to achieve (or not achieve) those results. So, there’s a corollary question: “What do users of the evaluation want to know?”

You might outline these two questions in columns as follows:

<b>Who(needs to know)</b>	<b>What</b>	<b>To Use For</b>
Funder	outcomes	final payment, future funding
Agency Director	participants' geographic distribution	Covering service area fully
Participants	how well they did compared to everyone else	personal satisfaction
Staff	why folks participated	recruiting for future programs  planning for future programs

One way to find out is to ask the potential users. You might be surprised. You may find answers or clues in press stories, web pages or other materials. I'll end this with a short story about what users wanted. As an Extension Educator a few years ago, I reported on a very successful program to the County Commissioners. After I finished outlining the outcomes and impacts, the only question was how many participants were from the towns in which the Commissioners resided. That was my awakening to ask first – if I had, I would have been able to highlight that information, capturing the attention of my target audience for the more important outcomes and impacts.

Please share any stories about who used evaluation, what they wanted to know, and any lessons you learned from the experience.

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