

Community Engagement/Extension Impact Statements
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Material adapted directly from “Impact Statement Reporting Course” on eXtension Campus Platform

1. Impact Statements and Why You Should Write Them

Impact statement is a brief summary, in lay terms, of the economic, social, and/or environmental impact of a program, including payoff to society. Impact is the measurable difference a program makes in the lives of others. It can be social, economic, and/or environmental. Impacts tend to be long-term achievements. They may be positive, negative, or neutral; intended or unintended.

Why write impact statements?

While impact reporting might seem like just another task, they're a crucial means of communicating meaningful impact to policy makers and the public. This type of reporting is particularly important for project leaders who rely on public support.

Here are some of the main ways impact statements can benefit your institution:

Funding: Projects that have demonstrable impact have a much better chance at getting funding than projects that don't. When you show that your work has impact, you give people a reason to fund it.

Accountability: Average citizens may be unaware of how their quality of life benefits from your work. A clear, succinct summary of an impactful program can show that tax dollars and/or donations are being carefully spent.

Outreach: It's important that stakeholders outside of the sphere of your institution know what you and your colleagues are doing, and how this work benefits the public.

Partnerships: Impact statements contain information that can be useful when developing relationships with partner organizations, such as NGOs or universities.

Media coverage: Impact statements are great tools for reporters. When you can hand a reporter a concise summary of a project, you increase your chances of receiving more in-depth and accurate coverage.

Validation: Think of impact reporting as a tool that enables you to do your job. If you can prove that you've made an impact, you've justified your job and proven your value in your field and in the eyes of policymakers, funders and the public.

Improved effectiveness: Writing an impact statement can improve your own effectiveness. It forces you to examine how you are spending your time and energy, and what kind of impact your work has.

Increased visibility: Although you should write impact statements for a predetermined audience, you never know who might read your impact statement and how this might come back to benefit you.

Enhanced credibility: An impact statement can solidify your position in your field; a wider audience will be able to see the value in what you are doing.

Shared knowledge: There are a number of regional and national databases and repositories for impact statements. These resources allow for valuable information sharing across institutional and geographical lines.

Accreditation: Impact statements can be useful in achieving and/or maintaining accreditation. As evidence of accomplishments, impact statements can be used to show program effectiveness. They also may help shape a mission statement and goals, and serve as tools to track how an organization is, or is not, meeting those goals.

Other uses of Impact Statements

You may wonder how you can possibly find the time for impact reporting. But in addition to the benefits outlined previously, impact statements can also help you save time, because you can repurpose them for other outreach projects.

Impact reporting can be the basis for a multitude of other communication efforts. Use the statements as seed materials for key stakeholders, such as politicians and donors. Keeping your work front-of-mind for these groups will help cement their ongoing support.

An individual impact statement can be worked into many different delivery vehicles, including:

- Annual reports
- Legislative briefings and constituent letters
- Website and social media content
- Searchable databases
- Speeches and presentations
- Displays and posters
- Newsletters
- Media tip sheets, press releases, and story pitches
- PSAs
- Background information for supporters, collaborators, advisory, alumni groups, etc.
- Grants and funding applications
- Federal reports

Recap Why Write Impact Statement

- An impact statement is a brief summary, written in lay terms, of the economic, societal, and/or environmental impact of a program.
- The purpose of an impact statement is to show a program's accomplishments and payoff to society.
- Impact statements answer the questions "So what?" and "Who cares?"
- Impact statement reporting helps raise the visibility of your work, which can result in many benefits, including increased funding and stronger public support.
- Impact statements can be used as foundational content for many other types of public communications.

2. Know Your Audience

Give your audience the information they need to make decisions and take action:

- **Why** you did what you did
- **How** you did it
- **What** the impact was

Selecting a Topic

You must be selective about the subject of your impact statement. You need to be able to show a measurable change, a payoff to society, and answer the questions “Who cares?” and “So what?”

Program evaluation can, in some cases, identify impact. But your goal is to move beyond the process and delve into the social, economic, and/or environmental change.

Consider the measurable impact of your potential topic, as well as the needs and interests of your audience, and the action(s) you want them to take.

Worksheet to brainstorm and narrow down impact statement topics

3: Definition of Impact

What is Impact

An Impact is the reportable, quantifiable difference or potential difference a program makes in the lives of real people. It shows a sustainable societal, environmental, and/or economic change.

Here are some social, environmental and economic impact examples:

Economic: A new integrated pest management program cut application of potato pesticides by 15 percent, resulting in average annual savings of \$2 per acre.

Environmental: The decrease in pesticide use reduced the measurable amount of carbaryl in runoff by 9 percent.

Social: Typically, 50 percent of first-time youth offenders re-enter the correction system within seven years. Of youth offenders who participated in the 4-H program, the number was just 10 percent.

What is not Impact

When it comes to defining impact, knowing what it is *not* can be as helpful as knowing what it is. With that in mind, impact is not:

- A long, detailed, technical account.
- Descriptions of process, activities.
- Numbers of people reached, acres served, meetings held.
- The same as success stories.
- The same as outputs.

Recap of Definition for Impact

- Impact is the reportable, quantifiable difference or potential difference a program makes in the lives of real people.
- Measuring impact should be built into a program.
- Impact can be social, environmental and/or economic in nature.
- Impact is not the same as output, nor are impact statements the same as success stories.
- Performance indicators are tools to manage and measure change within a project. SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-Bound) and QQTP (Quantity, Quality, Time, Place) are both types of performance indicators.
- Federal and state agencies, university research, non-profit institutions and other sources may have data that you can use to show impact.

4. How to Write an Impact

So far, we've covered what an impact statement is, but what does the actual statement look like?

Format

The outline of a strong impact statement has three main components: 1) It identifies what issue the project addressed, 2) how the issue was addressed (or the process), and 3) the result (impact).

Identifying the issue

The first section of an impact statement identifies the issue—the need, concern, or question that prompted the project. Use concrete data to define the issue whenever possible, and avoid vague statements or assumptions.

Here's an example of a well-defined issue:

*According to the CDC, diabetes rates have tripled since 1980, now affecting 24 million people in the U.S. **In Delaware it is estimated that 66,000 people above age 18 have diabetes. This is approximately 9% of the population of the state.** Many more individuals have diabetes but have not been officially diagnosed. Diabetes is a common, serious and costly disease. Left unchecked the common physical problems associated with diabetes can be disabling and even life threatening.*

Process

The next section of an impact statement shows the process, or the work that was done to address the issue. This is where you describe the outputs of your program. Explain what was done, who the audience was, and who did the work.

Impact

Remember that hosting workshops, distributing flyers, launching a website, etc., are just the processes you went through while trying to address a need—they don't constitute impact. In the third and final section of an impact statement, you'll show the *outcomes* of that work. In other words, you answer the question of "So what?" What environmental, economic, or social changes resulted from this work?

When used correctly, anecdotal evidence—true personal stories or testimonials—can be an excellent way to show impact, particularly for behavioral change. For example, you could quote a student who attributes his improved grades to confidence gleaned from 4-H, or a community member who was tested for Lyme disease after reading about the risk factors and symptoms on a county Extension website. A telling quote from one person who changed his or her behavior as a result of your program can be very powerful. Anecdotal impact is particularly useful for programs that reached only a small number of people.

Writing Checklist

Before You Begin	As You Write	Writing Tips
Identify the target audience: Who are the key players who can help you meet your goals?	Identify the issue: What was the need?	Write clearly and concisely
Identify the action you want from the target audience	Describe the process: What did you do?	Do not use jargon. Be “user-friendly.”
Identify the point of contact: Who will be listed on the statement?	Show impact: The quantifiable, social, environmental and/or economic outcomes	Use only as much detail as absolutely necessary
Identify resources for further information: Are there websites, articles, etc.?	Answer “Who Cares, So What, and Why?”	Keep it short – 1-2 pages

Visual Elements

Graphs and charts can improve your impact statement, but take care to add these elements only if they can add value.

Adding Other Resources

Impact statements should be brief, but you’ll want to give readers a way to find out more information. This could be a link to a department website or research paper, or ways to contact faculty.

Grading Impact Statements

- A. High Impact:** An “A” statement shows a clear social, environmental, and/or economic change, and how the program benefits society.
- B. Moderate Impact:** The statement has all the pieces, but shows minimal impact. With some additional data it could be an “A” statement.
- C. Low Impact:** It lacks measurable data and doesn’t show any public benefit or impact. It’s more about the process than the impact.
- D. No Impact:** It does not answer the questions “So what?” and “Who cares?” The writer needs to collect more data and rewrite.

Recap on How to Write an Impact Statement

- An impact statement is formatted into three main components: The *issue* the project addressed, the *process* by which the issue was addressed, and the *result* (impact).
- All three components need to be present in an impact statement.
- Anecdotal evidence – true, personal stories or testimonials – can be an excellent way to show impact.
- Avoid using jargon and technical language in impact statements.
- Add visual elements such as graphs and charts only if they add value to your impact statement.