



Types of Accountability Data

What kinds of program data do legislators and county commissioners look for?

Government officials are interested in various kinds of program data. Set up an informal meeting with your local official (coffee or breakfast) to find out what they would like to know about the new program you are launching. Your aim is to gather what is important to *them*. Collecting data of this kind is called stakeholder evaluation. Its purpose is accountability (i.e., to justify your program so as to retain funding and other types of support). Accountability has several types of data depending on the requirements of the official involved (Taylor, 1992).

Type 1: Describe the Process, No Evaluation Data.

Talk about the purpose of your program and its target audience, the content and methods of teaching, how often, and where you conducted the program. Photographs, videos, and selected materials help convey the potential benefit of the program. Be concrete. For instance, report the number of youth your program kept off the street. Some government officials seek only this level of information. (Funders often seek it in the first year of a program.)

Type 2: Describe the Process in Relation to the Plan.

Include what you set out to do as well as the program you actually developed. This comparison reveals that you are a systematic planner and can conceptualize the necessary components of a good educational program geared to reducing whatever problem you are addressing. Report for instance, that you aimed to bring 25 youth into the program and that you reached that goal through various types of marketing strategies. The message: You are someone who thinks ahead and thus is trustworthy with scarce funding dollars.

Type 3: Describe Outcomes Based on Perception.

Design evaluation tools that measure participants' perception of what they learned, how well they can perform the skill you taught them, or what they believe they will do as a result of the program. Typical questions might include: To what extent did you increase your ability to use no-till methods? Evaluation data from short-term adult education programs often report these outcomes.

Type 4: Describe Outcomes Based on Empirical Data.

Design *pre* and *post* measures to learn exactly what participants knew or were doing before the program as well as afterwards. Learn who else besides extension had a role in any changes by using a control group in another county.

The important message? You need to tailor your evaluation strategy—different government officials find different kinds of program information significant. Sometimes they want evaluation data (Type 3 and 4) but sometimes they merely want to know how the program works (Type 1 and 2).

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