

Top 9 Tips for Your Impact Statement

You've held your program and it was successful, and now it's time to write the impact statement describing your efforts and the results. Taking the time to write a good impact statement is an important component of the program development process. It is the tool you use to show the value of your programs to those who make decisions about program resources and influence decision makers.

Here are some tips to help you create an effective impact statement:

1. Be Brief, Concise, and Readable

A study in North Carolina indicated that elected officials prefer to receive information in reports of one page or less. Always keep in mind the audience(s) who will be reading the report. One thing that can help to ensure that your report is concise is to delete all extra words, or even sentences, that do not contribute to telling the story. Many times we have far more data than is usable in one impact statement. Be selective, and use the best percentages or anecdotes, not all.

2. Don't use "Extensionese"

Every organization has their "in-house" terminology, and Extension is no different. Just remember that when you are writing impact statements, you need to explain your program in layman's terms. Do not just write about Professor Popcorn. Write about the basic nutrition program for youth. Don't just write about Junior Leaders, but write about the teen leadership program you are doing. If this is hard for you to grasp, think about writing your impact statement for the governor. Would he know what all these programs we do in Extension are by the "catchy" titles we give them?

3. Visualize like the Sports Page

Write your impact statement like the journalists write the sports page- who's playing, what happened, what was the "score", and so what. More than that can be saved for your other narrative reports. Include in your impact statement the players – who were involved. Be sure to identify your audience, especially if it is an underserved group. Many times we will attempt to aggregate impact statements to show Extension's efforts to one audience or another, such as Habitat for Humanity, Low-income, etc. If you don't include that information, we can't use your impact statement.

Write concisely about what you did (what happened in the game). Instead of saying, "the program was delivered through group meetings and one-on-one consultation with program participants," you should identify number of activities, such as, "A series of four group educational sessions were conducted on the use of recommended forage handling practices followed by one-on-one on-farm visits with 32 forage producers to discuss utilization of practices for individual situations."

Next tell the "Score" – the impact. The impact should reflect what has happened to the program participants as a result of their participation. What changes have taken place in their knowledge, skills, or aspirations? What behaviors have changed or been adopted? What social, economic, or environmental changes have taken place as a result?

Finally, describe why it is important. If the outcome is knowledge gained by the participants, you may want to identify what the value of having this knowledge will be to the participants. Will they be able to make more nutritious food choices? Will they be able to make better career plans? Will they be able to save money, thus feel more financially secure?

4. Identify the Subject Matter covered

Do not assume everyone will know what you have done by the title of your program. You are the expert in the subject matter and programs you are writing impact on, but the person reading your impact statement may not be. You need to include a sentence or two about what your program is about. Is it a leadership development program? Is it a nutrition program? Is it a financial management program? Doing this serves two purposes: It allows your reader to better know what you have done, and it allows us to do searches on impact statements and include all programs.

5. Avoid vague words

Vague words such as relatively, few, almost, approximately, highly, nearly, significant, some, usually, appreciable, and often have no place in an effective impact statement. Even a reader familiar with Extension will probably not know how many participants are a “significant” number of participants.

6. Do not write in the first person

Always write your impact statement in third person. Do not write it in first person. The word “I” should never be found in an impact statement.

7. Always include the number of people you reach.

Perhaps your numbers aren't as high as you would have liked, but always include them. When we want to combine impact statements and aggregate the data, we need everyone's. If you leave the numbers out, we can't get a good count for the entire system.

8. Do not include URLs in an impact statement

Elected officials want short concise reports of activities, so do not include a statement such as, “for further information see our website.” That implies that all the information they need has not been included in the impact statement.

9. PROOFREAD!

An impact statement with spelling/grammar errors is not professional. **Enough said.**