

Integrating Evaluation Data in Communication for Sustainability

Evaluation data give credence to the good work of your Safe Schools/Healthy Students (SS/HS) initiative. It helps define your successes in measurable terms. It can validate your efforts to the wider public and increase the perception that your programs and services have become truly necessary to the well-being of your community. Moreover, when presented effectively, the evaluation data you've been collecting over the course of your grant cycle have the power to help sustain elements of your initiative; data become an invaluable tool for communicating with specific audiences who are in a position to help your work live on past grant funding.

Crafting communication materials that can best assist in your sustainability efforts requires, above all, that you know as much about your intended audience as possible. Not everyone has the time or inclination to read a 50-page report, and not everyone will respond well to a PowerPoint presentation. Some audiences prefer a well-crafted narrative with anecdotal stories, others will trust charts and graphs that represent hard data outcomes, and still others will need to see data represented in other visual and linguistic ways.

Confused about where to begin? Below is a trusted, strategic process you can follow to incorporate your evaluation data into resonant communication pieces and presentations that celebrate your successes and sway audience perceptions.

First, have you identified those functions in your initiative that are targeted for sustainability?

When it comes to developing any communication for sustainability, this is always the critical first step. Work with your partners and your National Center technical assistance specialist to define your goals and objectives for sustainability.

Whom do you need at the table?

In other words, which people and organizations in your community could feasibly help support your goals for sustainability? You'll want to look for organizations whose mission, goals, priorities, or values are comparable to yours. It helps to follow the flow of money in your community: How are existing youth services funded in your area? We encourage you to work with your existing partners to brainstorm this list, and you also may want to work with your evaluator to conduct an audit of like-minded agencies in your community.

Intended audiences for sustainability that are common to many SS/HS grant sites often include:

- Service providers;
- Local, state, and national policymakers;
- Agency administrators;
- Business leaders;
- Faith-based leaders;
- District leadership; and
- Community-based organizations.

Which stories do they want to hear?

This critical question can be answered by learning as much as possible about your intended audience. When it comes to creating communication materials using your evaluation data, ask:

- What kinds of information does the audience trust—hard numbers, anecdotal stories, or a combination?
- Will they commit to spending time poring over long reports, or will they appreciate the brevity of a well-composed factsheet?
- Will they understand the data if they are conveyed in traditional charts and graphs? If not, how can the data be represented effectively in other ways?
- What are their goals, values, and priorities? Policymakers may be most concerned with the cost effectiveness of your prevention programs, while business leaders may perceive that investing in youth now will create a strong workforce for your community's future.
- What elements of your initiative will they care about most? Will they be most impressed by improved academic performance? Reduction in teen pregnancies? The number of clients served? Client satisfaction? Changes in student behavior or improvement in classroom climate? Increased security measures on campus? Reduction in truancy and absenteeism—and the money that might be bringing back to your district?
- Are they involved in other community partnerships and, if so, do you know what compelled them to get involved? Do you know how they contribute to their other partnerships?
- In what way do your initiative's goals coincide with theirs? Can you state this easily?

What data do you have to make your case?

Take this opportunity to inventory the data you've collected to date. Assess the data's reliability so you can be sure to work with data that are truly representative of your site's delivery and outcomes. Work with your evaluator to separate your data into categories that will make it easier for you to extract the specific information that will be most meaningful to your intended audiences:

Descriptive	Outcome
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is cross-sectional. • Looks at what's happening right now. • Describes characteristics of people, organizations, or programs at a single point in time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is longitudinal. • Looks at trends over time. • Tracks people, organizations, or programs over time using the same measures. • Assesses change in people, programs, or organizations. • Has an established baseline.
Quantitative	Qualitative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relies more on numbers to tell a story. • Answers close-ended questions. • Is obtained through structured gathering and existing records. • Often includes larger numbers of participants. • Provides fewer contexts for responses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relies more on words to tell a story. • Answers open-ended questions. • Is obtained through observation. • Often involves few participants. • Is contextual in detail; observes feelings and perceptions in an effort to get a holistic understanding.

These categories are not mutually exclusive—it can be quantitative descriptive data or qualitative outcome data. Using the information you’ve gathered about your new intended audience’s own needs, you can extract the data that will have the greatest impact for use in your communication materials. Remember, these are the data that will help tell your story in a way that truly resonates with your intended audience and moves them to take action.

What’s the best way to deliver these stories to your intended audiences?

No matter which data you use or which audience you’ve set out to reach, you will help make your case if your presentation is:

- Easy to understand *for them*;
- Relevant and timely *to them*;
- Aesthetically appealing *to them*; and
- Delivered by a source that’s trustworthy *to them*.

Since you’ve already gotten to know your intended audience, you’ll have an easier time assessing which kind(s) of delivery methods will work best. To stimulate your thinking, the tables below provide an array of methods for both organizing and delivering data:

Methods for Conveying Your Data In Your Materials

Traditional charts, tables, and graphs:

- Convert numbers to a visual representation;
- Can serve quantitative data that is descriptive *or* reports outcomes;
- Can be created as standalone pieces or embedded into virtually any other kind of collateral; and
- May be challenging for some audiences to understand.

Social math:

- Requires numbers (not percentages) to calculate the equation;
- Can be conveyed visually and/or linguistically; and
- Is not about dumbing down the data. Social math crystallizes the data by providing a context and comparison that your audiences easily understand.

Anecdotal evidence or stories:

- Provide qualitative support to your data;
- Put a human face on your initiative’s work;
- Can come from anyone who has been positively touched by your initiative’s work (e.g., parents, teachers, students, administrators, partners);
- Can be provided as stories or quotes;
- Can be conveyed in writing or through audio or video;
- Are often an important and persuasive data source—particularly when coupled with quantitative data; and
- Must honor client confidentiality requirements.

Materials

Narrative reports:

- Are offered once or periodically;
- Fully illustrate initiative goals, objectives, delivery of services, and outcomes;
- Can include all types of data; and
- Are good for audiences who indicate an interest in seeing the big picture.

Factsheets or program profiles:

- Are one-sheets that can provide an overview of the initiative *or* a set of one-sheets that covers your array of programs and services (can mix and match as appropriate for different audiences);
- Make an excellent leave behind at meetings; and
- Are good for audiences who want a quick and accurate overview, such as policymakers.

PowerPoint presentations:

- Are the easy-to-use, industry standard for presentations from Microsoft; Apple's comparable product for Macs is Keynote;
- Can incorporate simple narrative, charts, graphs, photos, video, and audio;
- Are excellent for presentations to a group;
- Can be posted on a Web site or made available for viewing at public events; and
- Can be shared via email and archived online.

Press materials:

- Can succinctly integrate key data points into the overall message in a variety of press materials:
 - Backgrounder provides information on the local/national initiative;
 - Press release highlights specific issues, activities, and outcomes of current interest; and
 - Talking points are provided to the initiative spokesperson and are used at press conferences, public events, and other relevant events.

Other materials:

- Audio/video: Can help effectively tell the story behind your data through use of images, stories, and audio. Is generally easy for most audiences to follow.
- Posters and infographics: Can convey key quantitative or qualitative data points through visuals and limited text.

Delivery Channels

Face-to-face meetings:

- Provide messages and data best delivered by a trusted source of information;
- Present peer-to-peer meetings, which can be very successful (e.g., an existing business partner makes a presentation to the chamber of commerce on behalf of your initiative);
- Create and deepen relationships; and
- Allow the opportunity to leave behind meaningful information (e.g., factsheets)—to be followed up in a timely and appropriate manner.

Presentations to larger groups:

- Include school board, chamber of commerce, parent teacher association, and local ecumenical council;
- Use PowerPoint presentations, as appropriate, customizing them with audience-specific messages, data, and calls to action; and
- Can provide attendees with printouts of the PowerPoint slides, factsheets, or other appropriate leave behinds.

Public testimony:

- Provides a compelling human story that supports your initiative's work;
- Often is accompanied by quantitative data, delivered in materials appropriate to the audience; and
- Can be delivered by an initiative spokesperson and/or anyone who has been positively affected by the services you've provided. Consider which kinds of stories will have the greatest impact on your audience.

Local media:

- Can be effective for reporting, raising awareness of prevention activities, or promoting key issues and successes to the general public;
- Can promote or cover any event hosted by your local initiative (see the Event Planning section of this Celebration Kit for more support in this area);
- Can be interested in a human interest angle, such as the individual successes of your initiative (see the Media Outreach section of this Celebration Kit for tips); and
- Can also provide data in narrative form to illustrate overall initiative objectives and outcomes.

Web sites and social media sites:

- Provide a supplemental outlet for dissemination of data;
- Are available 24/7 for anyone to see; and
- Provide an archive for stories, materials, videos, and other resources.

Newsletters:

- Tell an ongoing story to an audience who is already interested in your work;
- Can increase support and momentum for your initiative over time; and
- Provide an opportunity to blend short narratives with charts, graphs, and photos.

With all of these options in mind, the opportunities for conveying data are quite large. To choose the best method, keep returning to a core question: *How can I best convey my data so that my audience will understand it—and be moved to action?*

This guide was created for Safe Schools/Healthy Students grantees by the Communication & Social Marketing (CSM) Center—a partnership of ICF International, The Gallup Organization, and Kauffman & Associates, Inc.