

IMPACT WRITING

Increasingly, the issue and need to prepare meaningful impact statements is becoming a priority matter for administrators, faculty and staff. We are all spending more time on this activity and rightly so. As administrative advisors to regional projects and committees, we need to bring the matter of preparation of impact statements to the forefront of our project and committee activities. Assisting the project or committee with this process of impact statement preparation is one of the more important roles that an administrative advisor plays.

Why is the preparation of impact statements so important? Clearly, and perhaps the most important reason we need to be able to respond and prepare well-focused and articulate impact statements, is our need to justify and even defend the investments that are made to our system by Congress for public sector research and extension activities.

So how do you prepare an effective impact statement? What is an effective impact statement, and how can I assist my regional project or committee with this task?

In many ways, the impact statement is the most important element of a marketing plan. It's the culmination of a successful program, the proof of a responsive effort in research or extension. As we advise our regional projects and committees, we should always keep an "eye" toward finding the impactful message, e.g., that finding that will aid us in marketing our programs. The impact statement is really nothing more than an accountability statement. You just need to identify the impact, and then know how to use it effectively, or at least prepare the impact statement in a manner that others can use effectively.

The clearly written impact statement presents the results of the research or extension effort to the targeted audience. In one short paragraph you need to explain the problem or issue you're trying to solve, and its importance. Here is where you can benchmark the problem and even establish cost-benefits for the stakeholder. It is the "***Who Cares, So What and What's New***" question. If you can answer this question, you can write an effective impact statement.

In general, the effective impact statement not only answers the "***Who Cares, So What and What's New***" question, it is a brief summary in lay terms, written to demonstrate in an economic, environmental or social context the impact of your effort(s), the accomplishments and the payoff to stakeholders. Another way of stating this is – "*Impact is the difference that your program(s) are making in people's lives and well-being*". In more technical terms, impact is the reportable and verifiable difference that a program makes in the lives of citizens. Just remember, impact reporting is not activities reporting.

In your one paragraph can you explain the problem or issue and its importance? Ask yourself: What prompted this work? How important is this issue to the region, or nation? How widespread is this problem and who is affected?

Once you have defined the problem, set the stage and tell the reader why this information is important. Frame the scope of the problem or issue. Mention the potential public payoffs that have or are resulting from this work. Then describe what you did to solve the problem or address the issue. Provide in the briefest possible way, the details of the project that are meaningful to the non-scientist reading this statement. Then describe “*What has been done*”. It really is quite straightforward.

The impact paragraph is the heart of the statement that you are preparing. Here is where you quantify what you accomplished in economic, environmental or social terms. How do your findings relate to real people and real-world programs. This is where you reinforce the “*So What, Who Cares and What’s New*” question.

Lastly, finish your impact statement with the name, address, phone and/or e-mail contacts where the reader can turn to for more information. For some impact statements, it’s also important to list funding sources. Don’t forget those who contributed or played a role in making your effort successful.

Also critical is the issue of why impact reporting is important. It illustrates the accountability of the organization or program, it improves program visibility, generates materials for the lobbying effort, is a repository of anecdotes for speeches, talks, etc., helps the organization focus its efforts, and creates better understanding of programs with the public.

Bottom line, it is easier to sell science and education programs when there is an emphasis on outcomes.