



Reporting – Ensuring Outcomes and Impact are Clearly Communicated

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Ensuring your organisation successfully communicates what you are doing and the difference you are making to your beneficiaries can mean the difference between future funding being awarded or not.



Why is reporting important?

Communication with the outside world has never been more important. Ensuring your organisation successfully communicates what you are doing and the difference you are making to your beneficiaries can mean the difference between future funding being awarded or not.

Public confidence in charities needs constant improvement and the best way organisations can achieve this is to publicise the difference they actually make on a day to day basis. Otherwise, how will the public or your funders know that what you do is making a significant difference? Consider how regular reporting of achievements can assist in improving confidence and public perception of organisations in the sector.

Reporting outcomes to the wider public in a way that clearly demonstrates the impact of your work should

So, what should be done?

The fundamentals of your report should be that activities need to be assessed and measured, outcomes reviewed and explained and impacts communicated. The reporting process should start by defining a clear purpose, explaining why the organisation or project exists, describe what the organisation is tackling and illustrate the impact of the organisation. The impact should explain the difference the activity of the organisation has made; consider what the world would look like if this activity hadn't been undertaken, what would be different and how this is reflected in the impact and improvements achieved.

Look back to the beginning of the project and at the clearly defined aims in place.

be a hallmark of a successful charity. Informing the wider world what the money received achieves and not just what it was spent on is key.

Writing this type of report is the hardest part. When done, certain aspects of the information within the report can usually be re-used and replicated in a number of ways. A comprehensive report on outcomes for a funder, can translate into the trustees report, or form the basis of a web page, be used as a blog and sent out on social media, or be used again to demonstrate to future funders the difference you make. The really hard part is committing the time to sit down, clear a space and write something from scratch and most importantly from the heart of the organisation that is meaningful.

That is the challenge; here are some tools to help.

Why are you doing these things? What are they going to achieve? Consider the activity itself, the method of funding, the resources it uses and the part it plays in the bigger picture.

For each of the activities undertaken there is a need to understand and substantiate their success or otherwise; if results are not collated and successes assessed, how would you be able to learn from behaviours? Can we evidence to funders the money was used appropriately and the activity made a difference? Can its worth be proved to request further funding? If results are not monitored, how can lessons be learnt and improvements made? Continuous marginal improvements enable organisations to move forward and adapt, ensuring they stay ahead of the curve and gain access to future funds. 



➤ In each report you write, you need to aim to apply the principles of ‘communicating with impact’ as defined in the Principles of Good Impact Reporting.

- ① You need to ensure your reports are easily understandable, with a coherent narrative which connects all aspects of your organisation – i.e. your report must have **clarity**
- ② Your report needs to be **accessible**, allowing the information to be accessed easily by those who need it.
- ③ Your report also needs to be **transparent**, as with all your communications, as a charity, honesty and openness is extremely important.
- ④ It needs to be **accountable**, connecting all of your stakeholders and providing them with information and reassurance.
- ⑤ That information needs to be **verifiable**, appropriately backed and evidenced.
- ⑥ It needs **proportionality**, ensuring the level of detail reported on reflects the size and complexity of the activity and the change you are aiming for.

How to report outcomes effectively

There is work to be done:

- ① Funding – complete a flowchart starting with your objects and purposes, which links through to your funding streams that relate to each strand, further flowing into the projects and activities being undertaken. Do you receive funding and undertake activities which help you to achieve your objects and purposes?
- ② On an activity basis, determine the required outcomes. Does each project have a method of recording outcomes and measuring success? Does each project have a method of reporting?
- ③ Assess the information that points one and two provide. Do you have gaps in your recording and monitoring of outcomes for the work you undertake? Do you understand your successes; can you learn from your failures?

- ⑤ Time to read your reports. If you read your last trustees report, does it give you a real sense of what has been achieved or of what the world would have been like if your organisation didn’t exist or wasn’t funded?

Ask yourself, is your communication consistent, representative, appealing? Do people know you make a difference?

- ⑥ Finally, there must be areas for improvement. Plan how the organisation can improve its reporting of impact and its measurement of outcomes. Involve the whole organisation in the process and plan how to make your organisation stand out from the rest. Finally, don’t cut and paste last year’s trustee report into this one.



Checklist for the month

- ✓ Assess whether you gather the right kind of information that will allow you to write a meaningful report.
- ✓ Review your communications with the outside world. Categorise those that you have to do and those that you choose to do.
- ✓ Assess where material can be written once, and the time invested can be used over and over in different reports, applications etc.
- ✓ Involve other teams early on to assist with populating reports, hold a session to set everyone on the right track.
- ✓ Be bold – you do great work, your charity makes a difference, make sure your communications at every point demonstrate that.



Where can I get more information?

- **Impact reporting in the UK charity sectors – report by CFDG and Cass Business School**
- **Charity reporting and accounting: the essentials March 2015 – The Charity Commission**
- **Charities evaluation service www.ces-vol.org.uk**
- **Explaining the difference your project makes – Big lottery fund**
- **Advice and guidance on promotion and marketing www.wcva.org.uk**
- **Services and support on outcomes and impact www.ncvo.org.uk**
- **Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations www.scvo.org.uk**

If you have any questions arising from this article or would like to speak to a member of our team about how we can help. Please get in touch with your local MHA member firm.