Entering Impact Statements

Introduction

An impact statement is different than an accomplishment state. Impacts are about the differences Extension has achieved for people in terms of economic, environmental, and societal benefits that improve their lives.

An accomplishment statement "effectively describes the key actions, activities, or products" resulting from our programs. Accomplishment statements "reflect ongoing activities or key results that may not yet have had a significant economic, societal, and/or environmental benefit, but that lay the foundation for such a benefit" (NOAA).

With UMERS, you should begin building your impact statements even if you are still in the accomplishment phase of your work. The relevance and response sections can be completed and results can be documented as available.

Writing Impact Statements

Impact statements have three basic parts and a new language is being used to describe these parts:

1. Relevance (what is the problem and why it is important)
2. Response (what your program did to address the issue)
3. Results (what difference the program made for Maryland residents)

In addition, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) includes a fourth item called "Recap," which is a "one-sentence recapitulation that captures the essence of the preceding three points."

Impact statements should be as only long as needed to convey your story. Think about your audiences for the impact statements and ask yourself these questions:

1) How much time would my intended audience members be willing to spend reading this statement?
2) What are the literacy levels of my intended audiences?
3) What are the most critical points that my intended audiences will want to know?

Regardless of the intended audience, critical to all three parts of an impact statement is DATA because it provides credible evidence for readers. In addition, cited and reputable sources for the data should be used.

Use a formulaic approach to writing an impact statement by breaking it into the three main parts. If writing is problematic, try saying it first as if you were telling the story to a newspaper reporter or one of your colleagues.

The University of Tennessee Extension has developed these tips about writing effective impact statements:

- Be brief!
- Include numbers of participants and numbers that show a change in their quality of life.
- The longest part should be the impact.
- Focus on the outcomes (impact), not the activities (what has been done).
- Check spelling and grammar.

- Use short, easy words. The word "use" is preferable to "utilize".
- Vary sentence length to hold interest.
- Use short paragraphs that contain, on average, one to five sentences.
- Minimize affixes. Prefixes are syllables at the beginning of a root word and suffixes are syllables at the end of a root word. Together, prefixes and suffixes are called affixes. The word "valuable" is preferable to "invaluable".
- Use active instead of passive voice. Instead of "The grant application was approved by the Livestock Association" use "The Livestock Association approved the grant application."

Conversational writing is direct, lively and easy to understand.

An excellent resource for writing impact statements is the article, "Program Development in a Political World—It's All About Impact," in the Journal of Extension (February 2003), available at http://www.joe.org/joe/2003february/a6.php

Relevance:

Consider these two examples regarding relevance:

A) According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), each year "roughly one in six Americans or 48 million people get sick, 128,000 are hospitalized, and 3,000 die of foodborne diseases" (2011). The USDA Economic Research Service (ERS) estimates that $6.9 billion yearly in costs of medical expenses, lost productivity, and death are associated with only five bacterial pathogens. In Maryland,

B) Foodborne illnesses are a problem for the American people.

Which one do you think is a more persuasive and believable statement? The answer is A, of course! By using data from the CDC, readers are assured that the data are credible and that the issue has been researched. Choice B, without data, is basically an anecdotal statement or opinion being offered by the author.

Try to write the relevance statement in no more than 3 sentences. If you can get it to two sentences, as in the above example, that is great.

This is another example of a relevance statement:

Relevance:
    Sentence 1:
    Sentence 2:
    Sentence 3:

Response:

The response section should describe your program that addresses the issue/problem. The response statement should describe your program in 3-5 sentences at most.

This is an example of a program description for food safety:

The University of Maryland Extension Food Safety program helps consumers identify and control food safety risks and how to use the five basic practices recommended by the CDC to reduce foodborne illnesses: clean, separate, cook, chill, and report. Consumers attend a three-hour workshop with demonstrations on safety practices, hands-on skill development, and question and answer periods. In addition, consumers are provided with a website for further information and receive a magnetic fact/reminder card to take home to be attached to an appliance.

Response:
    Sentence 4
    Sentence 5
    Sentence 6

Results:

This is the most important section and one that must have data. Results should be tied directly to the relevance. You grabbed readers' attention with the relevance statement—making them care about the issue. In the response section, you tell readers' what UME has done to tackle the problem. Finally, in the results section, you tell readers what difference the program has made and why that matters.

> In 2013, 4,000 consumers attended the UME Food Safety program. In a follow-up survey six months after the training session, 100% of those who intended to wash hands with soap and water did so; 100% of those who indicated they would cook meat, poultry, and eggs using a thermometer had done so; 100% of those who indicated they would refrigerate leftovers promptly had done so; and 100% of those who indicated they would report foodborne illnesses had done so. Therefore, the UME Food Safety program has contributed to the reduction of foodborne illnesses in the State of Maryland and in the United States.

The University of Maryland Extension Food Safety program helps to reduce foodborne illnesses for Maryland residents. By reducing foodborne illnesses on a per capita basis, the State of Maryland could save $XXX for each individual in health care costs.