

ANALYZING EVALUATION RESULTS

Many community organizations frequently face an analysis “roadblock”: collecting large quantities of data that are never fully analyzed. Here are some keys to overcoming the analysis roadblock:

- * Demystify data analysis; data analysis can be an empowering process for your organization.
- * Develop a plan for data analysis, either to
 - conduct data analysis within your organization or
 - get help with analysis from outside consultants
- * Report your findings in ways that will engage program stakeholders, funders, and other community members.
- * Draw on your data to improve your program practices.

Data Analysis: Where to Begin?

1. Decide whether to do an *internal* analysis or use an *external* consultant.
2. Gather *first impressions*. Discuss the quality and breadth of data with the evaluation team.
Guiding questions:
 - Did anything occur that may have compromised the data?
 - What are the initial thoughts on evaluation results? Did anything come as a surprise?
 - What interviews or data sources are particularly rich or helpful?
3. *Organize* and “clean” your data. The purpose is to determine if you have accurate and quality responses to questions and processes. Examine all the data related to each research question separately. Ideally, there should be more than one data source for each question. Think if information is missing, misrepresented or inconsistent.
4. *Analyze* your data.
 - * *Quantitative data analysis* is the analysis of numbers. Quantitative data are best presented in the form of pictures, such as graphs and charts.
 - Sources of quantitative data include surveys, sign-in sheets, event forms, entrance interviews, or applications with demographic data; census data; and budget data.
 - Quantitative data analysis can consist of simple calculations yielding factual information on attendance, usage, changes in performance, or changes in knowledge or attitudes (e.g., pre- and posttests). Program staff can do this analysis with the help of spreadsheet software (e.g., Excel).

- ★ Qualitative data analysis is the analysis of words and pictures. Qualitative data are best presented as “word stories” or “video stories.”
 - Sources of qualitative data include observation notes, anecdotal records, document review, content analysis (e.g., of videos or youth media), and interviews and focus group notes.
 - Qualitative data analysis can include identifying themes in the data (a process called *coding*). Themes can be framed around your key evaluation questions or other sources. This analysis can also include creating a story from the data that uses descriptive details of behaviors and selections of representative quotes from those who were interviewed.

Interpreting your data can be done in the context of answering the following questions:

- ★ Are the results reasonable?
- ★ How can the results be explained?
- ★ What is surprising about the results?
- ★ What is missing from the results?
- ★ What implications do the results have for identifying how the program can improve?

When you prepare your findings, be sure to include positive and unexpected or negative results:

- ★ Positive results tell you where your program’s strengths are, motivate staff and other program stakeholders, and identify program areas that might be expanded.
- ★ Unexpected or negative results are crucial to framing recommendations and modifying practices. They can also be part of an argument for expanded funding or programming (e.g., increases in staffing or expansion of facilities).

Checklist for Data Analysis

- ★ Are the goals for data analysis realistic, given the program budget and staff commitments?
- ★ Are all possible data sources being drawn upon in order to develop findings?
- ★ Is there an effort to identify program weaknesses and program strengths?
- ★ Have efforts been made to involve program stakeholders?
- ★ Are findings and recommendations framed in such a way that they can be useful for program improvement?