

FROM VALUING TO VISUALIZATION: DATA INTERPRETATION & REPORTING

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March 20, 2013

The recording, slides, and handout for this webinar are available from evalu-ate.org/events/march_2013/



This material is based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation under Grant No. 1204683. The content reflects the views of the authors and not necessarily those of NSF.

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

Evaluation questions are overarching questions about the project's merit, worth, or significance that an evaluation seeks to answer based on evidence. When it comes to asking and answering evaluation questions, there are three common pitfalls: (1) Failing to define the boundaries of the evaluation with questions or other expressions of purpose; (2) Making judgments without explicitly linking them to evidence; and (3) Conveying results from a data perspective rather than an interpretive or use-oriented perspective.

VALUING

Asking evaluative questions calls for providing evaluative answers, which requires valuing. **Rubrics** are interpretive tools to aid evaluators and stakeholders to determine the merit, worth, or significance of a project's processes and outcomes. Rubrics can be developed for specific indicators, specifying the results that would represent, poor, fair, good, and excellent performance. (The evaluative terminology used should be tailored to context. Alternative terms could be used, such as below target—on target—above target.)

To learn more about using rubrics to facilitate interpretation in evaluation, see Jane Davidson's AEA365 Tip-a-Day blog entry at aea365.org/blog/?p=1537—be sure to also check out the other resource links she recommends.

VISUALIZATION

Data visualizations such as graphs, charts, and maps should enhance and expedite understanding of evaluation results. Visualizations should not necessarily be developed for every data point; they should be used judiciously to convey and reinforce key findings relevant to the overall purpose of the evaluation.

Tips

- Visualizations should be interpretable on their own, without supporting narrative.
- Truncating the scale used in a chart (e.g., showing 50 to 100 instead of 0 to 100) can influence interpretation. If you must truncate, do so consistently throughout a report.
- Avoid pie charts and other visualizations that require viewers to judge differences in area.
- Avoid gratuitous embellishments like 3-D effects.

To learn more about data visualization visit Stephen Few's website at www.perceptualedge.com—see especially "Examples" and the Graphic Design IQ Test.

RECOMMENDED READING

Fitzpatrick, J. L., Sanders, J. R., & Worthen, B. R. (2011). Identifying and selecting the evaluation questions and criteria (Chapter 13). In *Program evaluation: Alternative approaches and practical guidelines* (4th ed.). Indianapolis, IN: Pearson.

Davidson, E. J. (2005). *Evaluation methodology basics: The nuts and bolts of sound evaluation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.