Section F: Communicating Evaluation Findings

Conducting an evaluation is necessary but not sufficient for accountability. Being accountable also requires that the findings of the evaluation are communicated to program stakeholders. To be effective, communication of evaluation findings should follow the same basic principles for all good communication:

- Keep the needs and interests of your audience in mind.
- Be clear about your purpose for communicating with a given audience and state that purpose clearly.
- Avoid including irrelevant information that will distract your audience from getting the information they want and the information you want them to have.
- Provide adequate contextual information so audience members can interpret evaluation findings for themselves.
- Organize information so it is easy to find.

F.1 Writing Evaluation Reports

State Migrant Education Programs (MEPs) are required by statute to develop a written evaluation of the MEP and utilize the evaluation to guide program improvement. The following suggestions will help you develop a written evaluation report that will be useful for those involved with reviewing and improving the state and local MEPs.

- The *Guidance* suggests that states produce a written program evaluation report once every two to three years to document the evaluation of program implementation and results.
- Audiences for the state evaluation report include state and local MEP staff. All of these audiences have an interest in knowing what was accomplished, how it was accomplished, and how to accomplish more in the future.
- Parents and other advocacy groups may be most interested in how well migrant students are doing in school and what strategies work best to help them be successful in school. You might consider preparing targeted data briefs or “report cards” for communicating this kind of information with these audiences.
- The *Guidance* states that written reports should include the purpose of the evaluation, what data were collected and how they were collected, the findings of the implementation evaluation, results for Priority for Services (PFS) and other migrant students, and the implications for making decisions about the program.

- It is recommended that MEP evaluation reports also describe the identified needs of migrant students in your state, the general strategies recommended to address those needs, and the specific services that were provided to implement those strategies. This contextual information will help the reader understand and evaluate the significance of your Measurable Program Outcomes (MPOs).

F.2 Organizing the Evaluation Report

While there is no fixed format for state evaluation reports, it is helpful to begin with the purpose of the report and some contextual information. This still leaves you some flexibility to organize the results of the evaluation in a logical sequence that works for you.

Rather than rely on the outline for a traditional research report (e.g., program description, evaluation methodology, research results, conclusions), professional evaluators are beginning to experiment with more reader-friendly ways of organizing their reports, and so should you. Put yourself in the place of the reader and devise an organizational structure that would make it easy to find the information that is of greatest interest to you.

For example, you might try the following outline:

1. **Purpose of the evaluation report** – In the case of your state evaluation of the MEP, your purpose is to document the evaluation of program results and implementation in order to improve services for migrant children. For other audiences, the purpose of your evaluation communication might be to recognize the accomplishments of students and staff, invite feedback from interested stakeholders including local MEP staff, or educate funders and migrant student advocates about the challenges of serving migrant populations.
2. **MEP target population** – Details about the migrant population you serve provide useful context for understanding the challenges faced by migrant students in your state. This section would be a good place to include your state's criteria for identifying Priority for Services students who are failing or at risk of failing because of interruptions in their schooling. You might also present your state's Migrant Student Profile in a table and provide some narrative explanation of the unique characteristics of the population that influence how and when they are served (e.g., the relative proportions of migrant children in different grade levels including out-of-school youth, or whether migrant children predominantly reside in your state during the school year or the summer).
3. **Evaluation results** – Evaluation results are best understood in the context of the needs of the target population, the specific services that were delivered to address those needs, and the outcomes you expected to achieve. For this reason, you should experiment with ways to present contextual information in conjunction with evaluation questions, data collection methods, and findings. For example, you might decide to organize your results section by Areas of Need and create a table like the one in Figure F.1 to provide context. These tables could be used to introduce the evaluation questions

related to MPOs and service delivery in each Area of Need. Each table might then be followed by the related evaluation questions, a description of how data were collected, and the findings.

Table F.1 Example Table of Organizing Results Around Needs

Need: In order to complete school, migrant out-of-school youth (OSYs) require access to schooling during non-traditional hours and in settings that are easily accessible from the places where they live and work.	**Strategies**: Collaborate with employers to offer classes at or near places where large numbers of migrant OSYs work. Schedule classes during the late afternoon, early evening, or on weekends, depending on typical work schedules.
MPO1. In work places where classes are offered, at least 60% of identified migrant OSYs will be enrolled in these classes. **MPO2**. 90% of migrant OSYs enrolled in these classes will successfully complete their classes with a passing grade.	**Service Delivery Plans**: 1. Identify employers 2. Recruit eligible OSY employees to attend classes 3. Negotiate space for classes 4. Negotiate instructional time that accommodates work schedules 5. Recruit teachers to work non-traditional hours 6. Staff an academic help desk after class hours to help OSY students with homework as needed.

Evaluation Questions (Results):

1. At all participating work places combined, what percentage of eligible migrant OSYs are enrolled in a class?
2. Of the OSYs who completed a class, what percentage successfully completed it with a passing grade?

Evaluation Questions (Implementation):

3. How many work sites were recruited? How many eligible migrant OSYs are employed at these sites? When are classes offered at these (or nearby) sites?
4. What percentage of eligible OSYs at each work site are enrolled in a class?
5. If classes are under-enrolled, what accounts for low enrollment (e.g., lack of interest, inconvenient class schedules, wrong classes offered)?
6. Were an adequate number of qualified teachers recruited to teach the classes?
7. Are enrolled OSYs using the academic help desk? If so, what kinds of help are they requesting? Is help desk staff qualified to provide the requested help?

4. **Implications for improving services for migrant students** – For the sake of consistency and reader-friendliness, try to organize this section the same way you organized your results. In the case of the example above, results were organized by areas of need; for the sake of consistency, you would also discuss implications as they relate to improving services to meet specific needs. If the results had been organized by MPOs, you might then discuss the implications of improving services to achieve better results with respect to outcomes. In either case, how you approach implications for improving services will depend on how successful you were at achieving your desired outcomes.
    - If you were successful, consider what aspects of the services you delivered were most critical to your success. What are the implications for providing these services to more migrant children in the future?
    - If you did not achieve the expected outcomes, consider whether the implementation (or under-implementation) of specific services impacted these results. What are the implications for being able to fully implement these services in the future?
    - Are there other ways to implement these services in order to achieve success?

F.3 Displaying Data

Again, the basic principles for good communication apply when you are compiling data in tables and other visual display formats (e.g., bar charts, pie charts, line graphs):

- Keep your audience in mind. Provide them with the information they want or need most.
- Be clear about your purpose. Limit your display to communicate a few key points.
- Avoid distractions. Keep the design of your data display uncluttered and free of irrelevant information.
- Provide adequate context. Include a concise but descriptive title, unambiguous headings or data labels, clearly defined units of measure, and the size of the sample represented in the display.
- Organize the data so it is easy to find. For example, provide sample size information in the title or column headings.
- Be consistent in your labeling. For example, you can display Student Groups in columns or in rows, but do not switch back and forth. Similarly, use percentages throughout the table as opposed to using numbers for some variables and percentages for others.

For more information about using graphics to report evaluation results, review:

Minter, E. & Michaud, M. (2003). *Using Graphics to Report Evaluation Results*. Program Development & Evaluation. University of Wisconsin-Extension.

F.4 Summary of Key Points

- The basic principles for good communication apply whether you are writing a formal evaluation report or presenting data in visual display formats: Know your audience, be clear and concise in your purpose, provide adequate contextual information, and organize the information so that is accessible and understandable.
- The presentation, format, and emphasis of evaluation findings may vary depending on the audience and purpose of the document. For example, documents will look considerably different for policymakers as opposed to parents.
- Evaluation results are best understood in the context of the needs of the target population, the specific services that were delivered to address those needs, and the outcomes you expected to achieve. Look for ways to present contextual information in conjunction with evaluation questions, data collection methods, and findings.

F.5 Reflection Questions

1. Are the evaluation findings clearly linked to specific needs addressed and evaluation questions asked?
2. Is the document reader-friendly, that is, simple in language, well-organized, and consistent in styles and labeling?
3. Have we included too much information so that key points are lost on the reader? Have we included enough contextual information so that the reader can better understand the results?
4. Do the stated implications for the evaluation findings make sense based on the data presented?

F.6 Other Resources

Lester, W. B. & Braverman, M. T. (2004). Communicating Results to Different Audiences in Braverman, M.T., Constantine, N.A. & Slater, J.K. (Ed), *Foundations and Evaluation for Effective Philanthropy* (pp. 281-304). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

W.K. Kellogg Foundation Evaluation Handbook (Communicating Findings and Insights, pp. 96-98).